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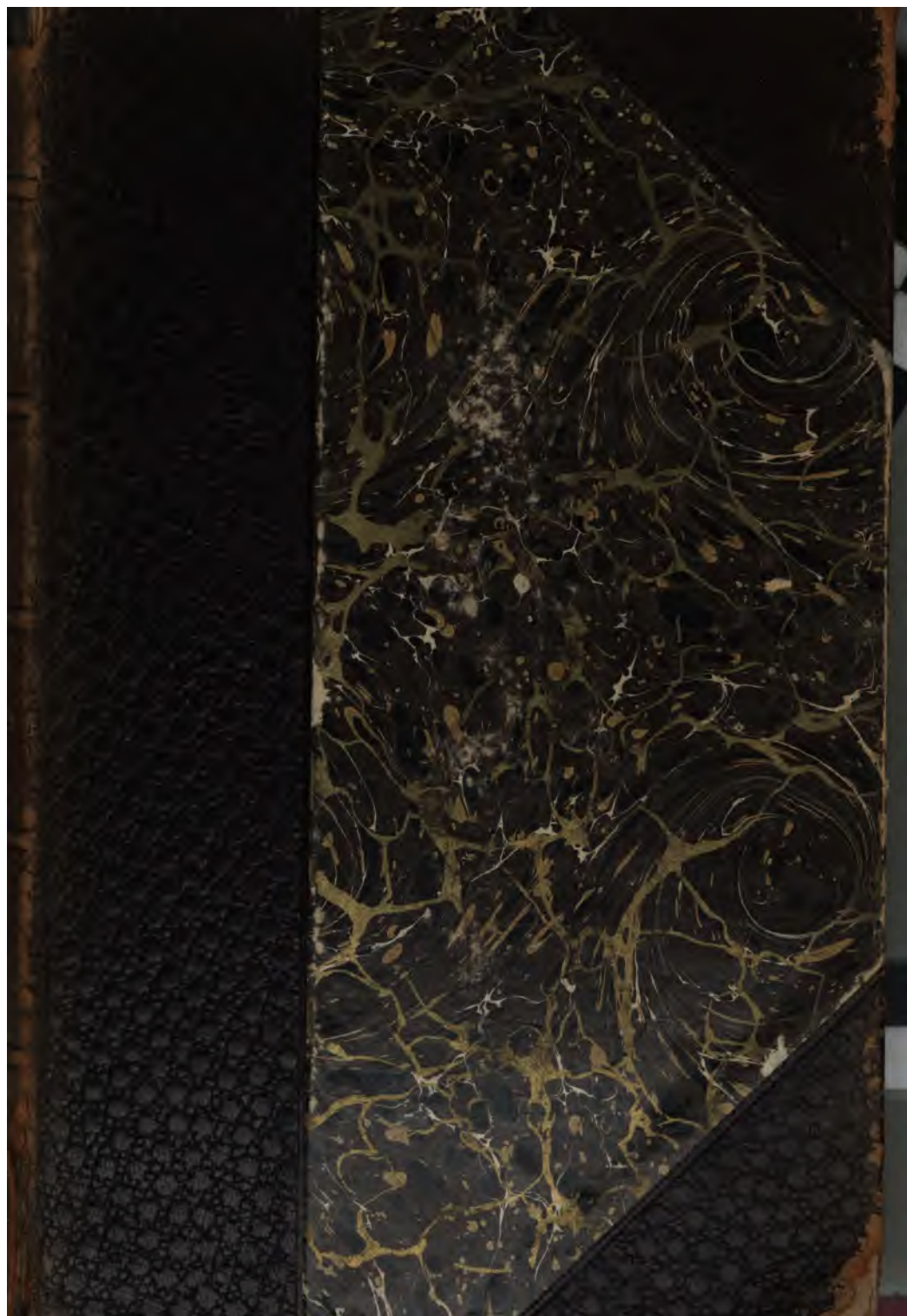
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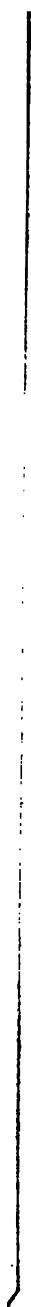
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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

"I SAY NO"
OR
THE LOVE-LETTER ANSWERED

AND OTHER STORIES

BY
WILKIE COLLINS
AUTHOR OF
"THE MOONSTONE" "THE TWO DESTINIES" "NO NAME"
"THE WOMAN IN WHITE" ETC., ETC.



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"I SAY NO:"

OR

THE LOVE-LETTER ANSWERED.

BOOK THE FIRST.—AT SCHOOL.

CHAPTER I.

THE SMUGGLED SUPPER.

OUTSIDE the bedroom the night was black and still.

The small rain fell too softly to be heard in the garden; not a leaf stirred in the airless calm; the watch-dog was asleep, the cats were indoors: far or near under the murky heaven not a sound was stirring.

Inside the bedroom the night was black and still.

Miss Ladd knew her business as a school-mistress too well to allow night lights; and Miss Ladd's young ladies were supposed to be fast asleep, in accordance with the rules of the house. Only at intervals the silence was faintly disturbed, when the restless turning of one of the girls in her bed betrayed itself by a gentle rustling between the sheets. In the long intervals of stillness not even the softly audible breathing of young creatures asleep was to be heard.

The first sound that told of life and movement revealed the mechanical movement of the clock. Speaking from the lower regions, the tongue of Father Time told the hour before midnight.

A soft voice rose wearily near the door of the room. It counted the strokes of the clock, and reminded one of the girls of the lapse of time.

"Emily! eleven o'clock."

There was no reply. After an interval the weary voice tried again, in louder tones.

"Emily!"

A girl whose bed was at the inner end of the room sighed under the heavy heat of the night, and said, in peremptory tones, "Is that Cecilia?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"I'm getting hungry, Emily. Is the new girl asleep?"

The new girl answered promptly and spitefully, "No, she isn't."

Having a private object of their own in view, the five wise virgins of Miss Ladd's first class had waited an hour, in wakeful anticipation of the falling asleep of the stranger, and it had ended in this way. A ripple of

laughter ran round the room. The new girl, mortified and offended, entered her protest in plain words.

"You are treating me shamefully! You all distrust me, because I am a stranger."

"Say we don't understand you," Emily answered, speaking for her school-fellows, "and you will be nearer the truth."

"Who expected you to understand me, when I only came here to-day? I have told you already my name is Francine De Sor. If you want to know more, I'm nineteen years old, and I come from the West Indies."

Emily still took the lead. "Why do you come *here*?" she asked. "Who ever heard of a girl joining a new school just before the holidays? You are nineteen years old, are you? I'm a year younger than you, and I have finished my education. The next big girl in the room is a year younger than me, and she has finished her education. What can you possibly have left to learn at your age?"

"Everything!" cried the stranger from the West Indies, with an outburst of tears. "I'm a poor ignorant creature. Your education ought to have taught you to pity me. I hate you all. For shame! for shame!"

Some of the girls laughed. One of them—the hungry girl who had counted the strokes of the clock—took Francine's part.

"Never mind their laughing, Miss De Sor. You are quite right; you have good reason to complain of us."

Miss De Sor dried her eyes. "Thank you, whoever you are," she answered, briskly.

"My name is Cecilia Wyvil," the other proceeded. "It was not, perhaps, quite nice of you to say you hated us all. At the same time, we have forgotten our good-breeding, and the least we can do is to beg your pardon."

This expression of generous sentiment appeared to have an irritating effect on the peremptory young person who took the lead in the room. Perhaps she disapproved of free trade in generous sentiment.

"I can tell you one thing, Cecilia," she said; "you sha'n't beat **ME** in generosity. Strike a light, one of you, and lay the blame on me if Miss Ladd finds us out. I mean to shake hands with the new girl—and how can I do it in the dark? Miss De Sor, my name's Brown, and I'm queen of the bedroom. I—not Cecilia—offer our apologies if we have offended you. Cecilia is my dearest friend, but I don't allow her to take the lead in the room. Oh, what a lovely night-gown!"

The sudden flow of the candle-light had revealed Francine sitting up in her bed, and displaying such treasures of real lace over her bosom that the queen lost all sense of royal dignity in irrepressible admiration. "Seven and sixpence," Emily remarked, looking at her own night-gown, and despising it. One after another the girls yielded to the attraction of the wonderful lace. Slim and plump, fair and dark, they circled round the new pupil in their flowing white robes, and arrived by common consent at one and the same conclusion: "How rich her father must be!"

Favored by fortune in the matter of money, was this enviable person possessed of beauty as well?

In the disposition of the beds, Miss De Sor was placed between Cecilia on the right hand and Emily on the left. If by some fantastic turn of events a man—say, in the interests of propriety, a married doctor, with

Miss Ladd to look after him—had been permitted to enter the room, and had been asked what he thought of the girls when he came out, he would not even have mentioned Francine. Blind to the beauties of the expensive night-gown, he would have noticed her long upper lip, her obstinate chin, her sallow complexion, her eyes placed too close together, and would have turned his attention to her nearest neighbors. On one side his languid interest would have been instantly aroused by Cecilia's glowing auburn hair, her exquisitely pure skin, and her tender blue eyes; on the other, he would have discovered a bright little creature, who would have fascinated and perplexed him at one and the same time. If he had been questioned about her by a stranger, he would have been at a loss to say positively whether she was dark or light; he would have remembered how her eyes had held him, but he would not have known of what color they were. And yet she would have remained a vivid picture in his memory when other impressions, derived at the same time, had vanished. "There was one little witch among them who was worth all the rest put together, and I can't tell you why. They called her Emily. If I wasn't a married man—" There he would have thought of his wife, and would have sighed, and said no more.

While the girls were still admiring Francine, the clock struck the half-hour past eleven.

Cecilia stole on tiptoe to the door, looked out, and listened, closed the door again, and addressed the meeting with the irresistible charm of her sweet voice and her persuasive smile.

"Are none of you hungry yet?" she inquired. "The teachers are safe in their rooms; we have set ourselves right with Francine. Why keep the supper waiting under Emily's bed?"

Such reasoning as this, with such personal attractions to recommend it, admitted of but one reply. The queen waved her hand graciously, and said, "Pull it out."

Is a lovely girl—whose face possesses the crowning charm of expression, whose slightest movement reveals the supple symmetry of her figure—less lovely because she is blessed with a good appetite, and is not ashamed to acknowledge it? With a grace all her own, Cecilia dived under the bed, and produced a basket of jam tarts, a basket of fruit and sweetmeats, a basket of sparkling lemonade, and a superb cake—all paid for by general subscription, and smuggled into the room by kind connivance of the servants. On this occasion the feast was especially plentiful and expensive, in commemoration not only of the arrival of the midsummer holidays, but of the coming freedom of Miss Ladd's two leading young ladies. With widely different destinies before them, Emily and Cecilia had completed their school life, and were now to go out into the world.

The contrast in the characters of the two girls showed itself even in such a trifle as the preparations for supper.

Gentle Cecilia, sitting on the floor surrounded by good things, left it to the ingenuity of others to decide whether the baskets should be all emptied at once, or handed round from bed to bed one at a time. In the mean while her lovely blue eyes rested tenderly on the tarts. Emily's commanding spirit seized on the reins of government, and employed each of her school-fellows in the occupation which she was fittest to undertake. "Miss De Sor, let me look at your hand. Ah, I thought so. You have got the

thickest wrist among us; you shall draw the corks. If you let the lemonade pop, not a drop of it goes down your throat. Effie, Annis, Priscilla, you are three notoriously lazy girls; it's doing you a true kindness to set you to work. Effie, clear the toilet table for supper: away with the combs, the brushes, and the looking-glass. Annis, tear up that old newspaper, and set the pieces out neatly for dishes and plates. No! I'll unpack; nobody touches the baskets but me. Priscilla, you have the prettiest ears in the room; you shall act as sentinel, my dear, and listen at the door. Cecilia, when you have done devouring those tarts with your eyes, take that pair of scissors (Miss De Sor, allow me to apologize for the mean manner in which this school is carried on; the knives and forks are counted and locked up every night)—I say take that pair of scissors, Cecilia, and carve the cake, and don't keep the largest bit for yourself. Are we all ready? Very well. Now take example by me. Talk as much as you like, so long as you don't talk too loud. There is one other thing before we begin. The men always propose toasts on these occasions: let's be like the men. Can any of you make a speech? Ah! it falls on me as usual. I propose the first toast. Down with all schools and teachers—especially the new teacher who came this half-year. Oh, mercy, how it stings!" The fixed gas in the lemonade took the orator at that moment by the throat, and effectually checked the flow of her eloquence. It made no difference to the girls. Excepting the case of feeble stomachs, who cares for eloquence in the presence of a supper table? There were no feeble stomachs in that bedroom. With what inexhaustible energy Miss Ladd's young ladies ate and drank! How merrily they enjoyed the delightful privilege of talking nonsense! And—alas! alas!—how vainly they tried in after-life to renew the once unalloyed enjoyment of tarts and lemonade!

In the unintelligible scheme of creation there appears to be no human happiness—not even the happiness of school-girls—which is ever complete. Just as it was drawing to a close, the enjoyment of the feast was interrupted by an alarm from the sentinel at the door.

"Put out the candle!" Priscilla whispered. "Somebody on the stairs."

CHAPTER II.

BIOGRAPHY IN THE BEDROOM.

THE candle was instantly extinguished. In discreet silence the girls stole back to their beds, and listened.

As an aid to the vigilance of the sentinel, the door had been left ajar. Through the narrow opening, a creaking of the broad wooden stairs of the old house became audible. In another moment there was silence. An interval passed, and the creaking was heard again. This time the sound was distant and diminishing. On a sudden it stopped. The midnight silence was disturbed no more.

What did this mean?

Had one among the many persons in authority under Miss Ladd's roof heard the girls talking, and ascended the stairs to surprise them in the act of violating one of the rules of the house? So far, such a proceeding was by no means uncommon. But was it within the limits of probability that a teacher should alter her opinion of her own duty half-way up the stairs,

and deliberately go back to her room again? The bare idea of such a thing was absurd on the face of it. What more rational explanation could ingenuity discover on the spur of the moment? Francine was the first to offer a suggestion. She shook and shivered in her bed, and said, "For Heaven's sake, light the candle again!—it's a ghost."

"Clear away the supper, you fools, before the ghost can report us to Miss Ladd."

With this excellent advice Emily checked the rising panic. The door was closed, the candle was lit; all traces of the supper disappeared. For five minutes more they listened again. No sound came from the stairs; no teacher, or ghost of a teacher, appeared at the door.

Having eaten her supper, Cecilia's immediate anxieties were at an end; she was at leisure to exert her intelligence for the benefit of her school-fellows. In her gentle, ingratiating way, she offered a composing suggestion. "When we heard the creaking, I don't believe there was anybody on the stairs. In these old houses there are always strange noises at night; and they say the stairs here were made more than two hundred years since."

The girls looked at each other with a sense of relief—but they waited to hear the opinion of the queen. Emily, as usual, justified the confidence placed in her. She discovered an ingenious method of putting Cecilia's suggestion to the test.

"Let's go on talking," she said. "If Cecilia is right, the teachers are all asleep, and we have nothing to fear from them. If she's wrong, we shall sooner or later see one of them at the door. Don't be alarmed, Miss De Sor. Catching us talking at night, in this school, only means a reprimand. Catching us with a light ends in punishment. Blow out the candle."

Francine's belief in the ghost was too sincerely superstitious to be shaken: she started up in bed. "Oh, don't leave me in the dark! I'll take the punishment, if we are found out."

"On your sacred word of honor?" Emily stipulated.

"Yes, yes!"

The queen's sense of humor was tickled. "There's something funny," she remarked, addressing her subjects, "in a big girl like this coming to a new school, and beginning with a punishment. May I ask if you are a foreigner, Miss De Sor?"

"My papa is a Spanish gentleman," Francine answered, with dignity.

"And your mamma?"

"My mamma is English."

"And you have always lived in the West Indies?"

"I have always lived in the island of San Domingo."

Emily checked off on her fingers the different points thus far discovered in the character of Mr. De Sor's daughter. "She's ignorant, and superstitious, and foreign, and rich. My dear (forgive the familiarity), you are an interesting girl, and we must really know more of you. Entertain the bedroom. What have you been about all your life? And what, in the name of wonder, brings you here? Stop! Before you begin, I insist on one condition, in the name of all the young ladies in the room. No useful information about the West Indies!"

Francine disappointed her audience.

She was ready enough to make herself an object of interest to her companions, but she was not possessed of the capacity to arrange events in their proper order, necessary to the recital of the simplest narrative. Emily was obliged to help her by means of questions. In one respect the result justified the trouble taken to obtain it. A sufficient reason was discovered for the extraordinary appearance of a new pupil on the day before the school closed for the holidays.

Mr. De Sor's social position at San Domingo had been (to use his daughter's words) the position of "a small planter, too poor to send to France or England for a governess." The mother's health was delicate; and the mother's interest centred in her only other child—a son, born in the later years of her married life. From first to last, Francine (in her own opinion) had been shamefully neglected. Six months since, the prospects of the family had changed for the better on the death of a bachelor relative. Mr. De Sor's brother had left him one of the finest estates in San Domingo, and a fortune in money as well, on the one easy condition that he continued to reside in the island. The question of expense being now beneath the notice of the family, Francine had been sent to England, specially recommended to Miss Ladd as a young lady with grand prospects, sorely in need of a fashionable education. The voyage had been so timed, by advice of the school-mistress, as to make the holidays a means of obtaining this object privately. Francine was to be taken to Brighton, where excellent masters could be obtained to assist Miss Ladd. With six weeks before her, she might in some degree make up for lost time; and, when the school opened again, she would avoid the mortification of being put down in the lowest class along with the children.

The examination of Miss De Sor, having produced these results, was pursued no further. Her character now appeared in a new, and not very attractive, light. She audaciously took to herself the whole credit of telling her story.

"I think it's my turn now," she said, "to be interested and amused. May I ask you to begin, Miss Emily? All I know of you at present is that your family name is Brown."

Emily held up her hand for silence.

Was the mysterious creaking on the stairs making itself heard once more? No. The sound that had caught Emily's quick ear came from the beds, on the opposite side of the room, occupied by the three lazy girls. With no new alarm to disturb them, Effie, Annis, and Priscilla had yielded to the composing influences of a good supper and a warm night. They were fast asleep, and the fattest of the three (softly, as became a young lady) was snoring!

The unblemished reputation of the bedroom was dear to Emily in her capacity of queen. She felt herself humiliated in the presence of the new pupil.

"If that girl ever gets a sweetheart," she said, indignantly, "I shall consider it my duty to warn the poor man before he marries her. Her ridiculous name is Euphemia. I have christened her (far more appropriately) Boiled Veal. No color in her hair, no color in her eyes, no color in her complexion. In short, no flavor in Euphemia. You naturally object to

snoring. Pardon me if I turn my back on you—I am going to throw my slipper at her.”

The soft voice of Cecilia—suspiciously drowsy in tone—interposed in the interests of mercy.

“She can’t help it, poor thing; and she really isn’t loud enough to disturb us.”

“She won’t disturb *you*, at any rate! Rouse yourself, Cecilia. We are wide-awake on this side of the room, and Francine says it’s our turn to amuse her.”

A low murmur, dying away gently in a sigh, was the only answer. Sweet Cecilia had yielded to the somnolent influences of the supper and the night. The soft infection of repose seemed to be in some danger of communicating itself to Francine. Her large mouth opened luxuriously in a long-continued yawn.

“Good-night!” said Emily.

Miss De Sor became wide-awake in an instant.

“No,” she said, positively; “you are quite mistaken if you think I am going to sleep. Please exert yourself, Miss Emily—I am waiting to be interested.”

Emily appeared to be unwilling to exert herself. She became interested in the weather.

“Isn’t the wind rising?” she said.

There could be no doubt of it. The leaves in the garden were beginning to rustle, and the pattering of the rain sounded on the windows.

Francine (as her straight chin proclaimed to all students of physiognomy) was an obstinate girl. Determined to carry her point, she tried Emily’s own system on Emily herself—she put questions.

“Have you been long at this school?”

“More than three years.”

“Have you got any brothers and sisters?”

“I am an only child.”

“Are your father and mother alive?”

Emily suddenly raised herself in her bed.

“Wait a minute,” she said. “I think I hear it again.”

“The creaking on the stairs?”

“Yes.”

Either she was mistaken, or the change for the worse in the weather made it not easy to hear slight noises in the house. The wind was still rising. The passage of it through the great trees in the garden began to sound like the fall of waves on a distant beach. It drove the rain—a heavy down-pour by this time—rattling against the windows.

“Almost a storm, isn’t it?” Emily said.

Francine’s last question had not been answered yet. She took the earliest opportunity of repeating it.

“Never mind the weather,” she said. “Tell me about your father and mother. Are they both alive?”

Emily’s reply only related to one of her parents.

“My mother died before I was old enough to feel my loss.”

“And your father?”

Emily referred to another relative—her father’s sister.

"Since I have grown up," she proceeded, "my good aunt has been a second mother to me. My story is, in one respect, the reverse of yours. You are unexpectedly rich, and I am unexpectedly poor. My aunt's fortune was to have been my fortune if I outlived her. She has been ruined by the failure of a bank. In her old age she must live on an income of a hundred a year—and I must get my own living when I leave school."

"Surely your father can help you?" Francine persisted.

"His property is landed property." Her voice faltered as she referred to him, even in that indirect manner. "It is entailed; his nearest male relative inherits it."

The delicacy which is easily discouraged was not one of the weaknesses in the nature of Francine.

"Do I understand that your father is dead?" she asked.

Our thick-skinned fellow-creatures have the rest of us at their mercy: only give them time, and they carry their point in the end. In sad, subdued tones—telling of deeply rooted reserves of feeling, seldom revealed to strangers—Emily yielded at last.

"Yes," she said, "my father is dead."

"Long ago?"

"Some people might think it long ago. I was very fond of my father. It's nearly four years since he died, and my heart still aches when I think of him. I'm not easily depressed by troubles, Miss De Sor. But his death was sudden—he was in his grave when I first heard of it—and— Oh, he was so good to me! he was so good to me!"

The gay, high-spirited little creature, who took the lead among them all, who was the life and soul of the school, hid her face in her hands and burst out crying.

Startled and, to do her justice, ashamed, Francine attempted to make excuses. Emily's generous nature passed over the cruel persistency that had tortured her. "No, no; I have nothing to forgive. It isn't your fault. Other girls have got mothers and brothers and sisters, and get reconciled to such a loss as mine. Don't make excuses."

"Yes, but I want you to know that I feel for you," Francine insisted, without the slightest approach to sympathy in face, voice, or manner. "When my uncle died, and left us all the money, papa was much shocked. He trusted to time to help him."

"Time has been long about it with me, Francine. I am afraid there is something perverse in my nature; the hope of meeting again in a better world seems so faint and far away. No more of it now! Let us talk of that good creature who is asleep on the other side of you. Did I tell you that I must earn my own bread when I leave school? Well, Cecilia has written home and found an employment for me. Not a situation as governess—something quite out of the common way. You shall hear all about it."

In the brief interval that had passed, the weather had begun to change again. The wind was as high as ever, but, to judge by the lessening patter on the windows, the rain was passing away.

Emily began.

She was too grateful to her friend and school-fellow, and too deeply interested in her story, to notice the air of indifference with which Francine

settled herself on her pillow to hear the praises of Cecilia. The most beautiful girl in the school was not an object of interest to a young lady with an obstinate chin and unfortunately placed eyes. Pouring warm from the speaker's heart, the story ran smoothly on, to the monotonous accompaniment of the moaning wind. By fine degrees Francine's eyes closed, opened, and closed again. Toward the latter part of the narrative Emily's memory became, for the moment only, confused between two events. She stopped to consider—noticed Francine's silence, in an interval when she might have said a word of encouragement—and looked closer at her. Miss De Sor was asleep.

"She might have told me she was tired," Emily said to herself, quietly. "Well! the best thing I can do is to put out the light and follow her example."

As she took up the extinguisher, the bedroom door was suddenly opened from the outer side. A tall woman, robed in a black dressing-gown, stood on the threshold, looking at Emily.

CHAPTER III.

THE LATE MR. BROWN.

THE woman's lean long-fingered hand pointed to the candle.

"Don't put it out." Saying those words, she looked round the room, and satisfied herself that the other girls were asleep.

Emily laid down the extinguisher. "You mean to report us, of course," she said. "I am the only one awake, Miss Jethro; lay the blame on me."

"I have no intention of reporting you. But I have something to say."

She paused, and pushed her thick black hair (already streaked with gray) back from her temples. Her eyes, large and dark and dim, rested on Emily with a sorrowful interest. "When your young friends wake tomorrow morning," she went on, "you can tell them that the new teacher, whom nobody likes, has left the school."

For once even quick-witted Emily was bewildered. "Going away," she said, "when you have only been here since Easter!"

Miss Jethro advanced, not noticing Emily's expression of surprise. "I am not very strong at the best of times," she continued: "may I sit down on your bed?" Remarkable on other occasions for her cold composure, her voice trembled as she made that request—a strange request, surely, when there were chairs at her disposal.

Emily made room for her with the dazed look of a girl in a dream. "I beg your pardon, Miss Jethro, one of the things I can't endure is being puzzled. If you don't mean to report us, why did you come in and catch me with the light?"

Miss Jethro's explanation was far from relieving the perplexity which her conduct had caused.

"I have been mean enough," she answered, "to listen at the door, and I heard you talking of your father. I want to hear more about your father. That is why I came in."

"You knew my father!" Emily exclaimed.

"I believe I knew him. But his name is so common—there are so many thousands of 'James Browns' in England—that I am in fear of

making a mistake. I heard you say that he died nearly four years since. Can you mention any particulars which might help to enlighten me? If you think I am taking a liberty—"

Emily stopped her. "I would help you if I could," she said. "But I was in poor health at the time, and I was staying with friends far away in Scotland to try change of air. The news of my father's death brought on a relapse. Weeks passed before I was strong enough to travel—weeks and weeks before I saw his grave! I can only tell you what I know from my aunt. He died of heart-complaint."

Miss Jethro started.

Emily looked at her for the first time with eyes that betrayed a feeling of distrust. "What have I said to startle you?" she asked.

"Nothing. I am nervous in stormy weather—don't notice me." She went on abruptly with her inquiries. "Will you tell me the date of your father's death?"

"The date was the thirtieth of September, nearly four years since."

She waited, after that reply.

Miss Jethro was silent.

"And this," Emily continued, "is the thirtieth of June, eighteen hundred and eighty-one. You can now judge for yourself. Did you know my father?"

Miss Jethro answered, mechanically, using the same words.

"I did know your father."

Emily's feeling of distrust was not set at rest. "I never heard him speak of you," she said.

In her younger days the teacher must have been a handsome woman. Her grandly formed features still suggested the idea of imperial beauty—perhaps Jewish in its origin. Not the faintest change had disturbed the composure of her face, until Emily said, "I never heard him speak of you." Then the color flew into her pallid cheeks; her dim eyes became alive again with a momentary light. She left her seat on the bed, and, turning away, mastered the emotion that shook her.

"How hot the night is!" she said, and sighed, and resumed the subject with a steady countenance. "I am not surprised that your father never mentioned me—to *you*." She said it quietly; but her face was paler than ever. She sat down again on the bed. "Is there anything I can do for you," she asked, "before I go away? Oh, I only mean some trifling service that would lay you under no obligation, and would not oblige you to keep up your acquaintance with me."

Her eyes—the dim black eyes that must once have been irresistibly beautiful—looked at Emily so sadly that the generous girl reproached herself for having doubted her father's friend. "Are you thinking of *him*," she said, gently, "when you ask if you can be of service to me?"

Miss Jethro made no direct reply. "You were fond of your father?" she said, faintly, in a whisper. "You told your school-fellow that your heart still aches when you speak of him."

"I only told her the truth," Emily answered, simply.

Miss Jethro shuddered—on that hot night!—shuddered as if a chill had struck her.

Emily held out her hand: the kind feeling that had been roused in her

glittered prettily in her eyes. "I am afraid I have not done you justice," she said. "Will you forgive me and shake hands?"

Miss Jethro rose and drew back. "Look at the light!" she exclaimed.

The candle was all but burned out. Emily still offered her hand, and still Miss Jethro refused to see it.

"There is just light enough left," she said, "to show me my way to the door. Good-night—and good-by."

Emily caught at her dress, and stopped her. "Why won't you shake hands with me?" she asked.

The wick of the candle fell over in the socket, and left them in the dark. Emily resolutely held the teacher's dress. With or without light, she was still bent on making Miss Jethro explain herself.

They had throughout spoken in guarded tones, fearing to disturb the sleeping girls. The sudden darkness had its inevitable effect. Their voices sank to whispers now. "My father's friend," Emily pleaded, "is surely my friend?"

"Drop the subject."

"Why?"

"You can never be *my* friend."

"Why not?"

"Let me go!"

Emily's sense of self-respect forbade her to persist any longer. "I beg your pardon for having kept you here against your will," she said, and dropped her hold on the dress.

Miss Jethro instantly yielded on her side. "I am sorry to have been obstinate," she answered. "If you do despise me, it is, after all, no more than I have deserved." Her hot breath beat on Emily's face: the unhappy woman must have bent over the bed as she made her confession. "I am not a fit person for you to associate with."

"I don't believe it!"

Miss Jethro sighed bitterly. "Young and warm-hearted—I was once like you!" She controlled that outburst of despair. Her next words were spoken in steadier tones. "You *will* have it—you *shall* have it!" she said. "Some one (in this house or out of it, I don't know which) has betrayed me to the mistress of the school. A wretch in my situation suspects everybody, and, worse still, does it without reason or excuse. I heard you girls talking when you ought to have been asleep. You all dislike me. How did I know it mightn't be one of you? Absurd, to a person with a well-balanced mind. I went half-way up the stairs, and felt ashamed of myself, and went back to my room. If I could only have got some rest! Ah, well, it was not to be done. My own vile suspicions kept me awake; I left my bed again. You know what I heard on the other side of that door, and why I was interested in hearing it. Your father never told me he had a daughter. 'Miss Brown,' at this school, was any 'Miss Brown' to me: I had no idea of who you really were until to-night. I'm wandering. What does all this matter to you? Miss Ladd has been merciful; she lets me go without exposing me. You can guess what has happened. No? Not even yet? Is it innocence or kindness that makes you so slow to understand? My dear, I have obtained admission to this respectable house by means of false references, and I have been discovered. Now you

know why you must not be the friend of such a woman as I am! Once more, good-night—and good-by."

Emily shrank from that miserable farewell. "Bid me good-night," she said, "but don't bid me good-by. Let me see you again."

"Never!"

The sound of the softly closed door was just audible in the darkness. She had spoken; she had gone, never to be seen by Emily again.

Miserable, interesting, unfathomable creature—the problem that night of Emily's waking thoughts, the phantom of her dreams. "Bad, or good?" she asked herself. "False, for she listened at the door; true, for she told me the tale of her own disgrace. A friend of my father; and she never knew that he had a daughter. Refined, accomplished, lady-like; and she stoops to use a false reference. Who is to reconcile such contradictions as these?"

Dawn looked in at the window—dawn of the memorable day which was, for Emily, the beginning of a new life. The years were before her; and the years in their course reveal baffling mysteries of life and death.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS LADD'S DRAWING MASTER.

FRANCINE was awakened the next morning by one of the house-maids bringing up her breakfast on a tray. Astonished at this concession to laziness in an institution devoted to the practice of all the virtues, she looked round. The bedroom was deserted.

"The other young ladies are as busy as bees, miss," the house-maid explained. "They were up and dressed two hours ago, and the breakfast has been cleared away long since. It's Miss Emily's fault. She wouldn't allow them to wake you; she said you could be of no possible use downstairs, and you had better be treated like a visitor. Miss Cecilia was so distressed at your missing your breakfast that she spoke to the house-keeper, and I was sent up to you. Please to excuse it if the tea's cold. This is Grand Day, and we are all topsy-turvy in consequence."

Inquiring what "Grand Day" meant, and why it produced this extraordinary result in a ladies' school, Francine discovered that the first day of the vacation was devoted to the distribution of prizes in the presence of parents, guardians, and friends. An entertainment was added, comprising those merciless tests of human endurance called recitations, light refreshments and musical performances being distributed at intervals to encourage the exhausted audience. The local newspaper sent a reporter to describe the proceedings, and some of Miss Ladd's young ladies enjoyed the intoxicating luxury of seeing their names in print.

"It begins at three o'clock," the house-maid went on; "and what with practicing and rehearsing, and ornamenting the school-room, there's a hub-bub fit to make a person's head spin. Besides which," said the girl, lowering her voice and approaching a little nearer to Francine, "we have all been taken by surprise. The first thing in the morning Miss Jethro left us, without saying good-by to anybody."

"Who is Miss Jethro?"

"The new teacher, miss. We none of us liked her, and we all suspect there's something wrong. Miss Ladd and the clergyman had a long talk together yesterday (in private, you know), and they sent for Miss Jethro, which looks bad, doesn't it? Is there anything more I can do for you, miss? It's a beautiful day after the rain. If I was you, I should go and enjoy myself in the garden."

Having finished her breakfast, Francine decided on profiting by this sensible suggestion.

The servant who showed her the way to the garden was not favorably impressed by the new pupil: Francine's temper asserted itself a little too plainly in her face. To a girl possessing a high opinion of her own importance it was not very agreeable to feel herself excluded, as an illiterate stranger, from the one absorbing interest of her school-fellows. "Will the time ever come," she wondered, bitterly, "when I shall win a prize, and sing and play before all the company? How I should enjoy making the girls envy me!"

A broad lawn, overshadowed at one end by fine old trees, flower beds and shrubberies, and winding paths prettily and invitingly laid out, made the garden a welcome refuge on that fine summer morning. The novelty of the scene, after her experience in the West Indies, the delicious breezes cooled by the rain of the night, exerted their cheering influence even on the sullen disposition of Francine. She smiled, in spite of herself, as she followed the pleasant paths, and heard the birds singing their summer songs over her head.

Wandering among the trees, which occupied a considerable extent of ground, she passed into an open space beyond, and discovered an old fish-pond overgrown by aquatic plants. Dribblets of water trickled from a dilapidated fountain in the middle. On the farther side of the pond the ground sloped downward toward the south, and revealed, over a low paling, a pretty view of a village and its church, backed by fir woods mounting the heathy sides of a range of hills beyond. A fanciful little wooden building, imitating the form of a Swiss cottage, was placed so as to command the prospect. Near it, in the shadow of the building, stood a rustic chair and table, with a color-box on one, and a portfolio on the other. Fluttering over the grass, at the mercy of the capricious breeze, was a neglected sheet of drawing paper. Francine ran round the pond, and picked up the paper just as it was on the point of being tilted into the water. It contained a sketch in water-colors of the village and the woods. Francine had looked at the view itself with indifference; the picture of the view interested her. Ordinarily visitors to galleries of art which admit students show the same strange perversity. The work of the copyist commands their whole attention; they take no interest in the original picture.

Looking up from the sketch, Francine was startled. She discovered a man, at the window of the Swiss summer-house, watching her.

"When you have done with that drawing," he said, quietly, "please let me have it back again."

He was tall and thin and dark. His finely shaped, intelligent face—hidden, as to the lower part of it, by a curly black beard—would have been absolutely handsome, even in the eyes of a school-girl, but for the deep furrows that marked it prematurely between the eyebrows and at the sides of

the mouth. In the same way an underlying mockery impaired the attraction of his otherwise refined and gentle manner. Among his fellow-creatures, children and dogs were the only critics who appreciated his merits without discovering the defects which lessened the favorable appreciation of him by men and women. He dressed neatly, but his morning coat was badly made, and his picturesque felt hat was too old. In short, there seemed to be no good quality about him which was not perversely associated with a drawback of some kind. He was one of those harmless and luckless men, possessed of excellent qualities, who fail, nevertheless, to achieve popularity in their social sphere.

Francine handed his sketch to him through the window, doubtful whether the words that he had addressed to her were spoken in jest or in earnest.

"I only presumed to touch your drawing," she said, "because it was in danger."

"What danger?" he inquired.

Francine pointed to the pond. "If I had not been in time to pick it up, it would have been blown into the water."

"Do you think it was worth picking up?"

Putting that question, he looked first at the sketch, then at the view which it represented, then back again at the sketch. The corners of his mouth turned upward with a humorous expression of scorn. "Madame Nature," he said, "I beg your pardon." With those words, he composedly tore his work of art into small pieces, and scattered them out of the window.

"What a pity!" said Francine.

He joined her on the ground outside the cottage. "Why is it a pity?" he asked.

"Such a nice drawing."

"It isn't a nice drawing."

"You're not very polite, sir."

He looked at her—and sighed, as if he pitied so young a woman for having a temper so ready to take offense. In his flattest contradictions he always preserved the character of a politely positive man.

"Put it in plain words, miss," he replied. "I have offended the predominant sense in your nature—your sense of self-esteem. You don't like to be told, even indirectly, that you know nothing of Art. In these days everybody knows everything—and thinks nothing worth knowing, after all. But beware how you presume on an appearance of indifference, which is nothing but conceit in disguise. The ruling passion of civilized humanity is Conceit. You may try the regard of your dearest friend in any other way, and be forgiven. Ruffle the smooth surface of your friend's self-esteem, and there will be an unacknowledged coolness between you which will last for life. Excuse me for giving you the benefit of my trumpery experience. This sort of smart talk is *my* form of conceit. Can I be of use to you in some better way? Are you looking for one of our young ladies?"

Francine began to feel a certain reluctant interest in him when he spoke of "our young ladies." She asked if he belonged to the school.

The corners of his mouth turned up again. "I'm one of the masters," he said. "Are *you* going to belong to the school, too?"

Francine bent her head, with a gravity and condescension intended to keep him at his proper distance. Far from being discouraged, he per-

mitted his curiosity to take additional liberties. "Are you to have the misfortune of being one of my pupils?" he asked.

"I don't know who you are."

"You won't be much wiser when you do know. My name is Alban Morris."

Francine corrected herself. "I mean I don't know what you teach."

Alban Morris pointed to the fragments of his sketch from Nature. "I am a bad artist," he said. "Some bad artists become Royal Academicians. Some take to drink. Some get a pension. And some—I am one of them—find refuge in schools. Drawing is an 'extra' at this school. Will you take my advice? Spare your good father's pocket: say you don't want to learn to draw."

He was so gravely in earnest that Francine burst out laughing. "You are a strange man," she said.

"Wrong again, miss. I am only an unhappy man."

The furrows in his face deepened, the latent humor died out of his eyes. He turned to the summer-house window, and took up a pipe and tobacco pouch left on the ledge.

"I lost my only friend last year," he said. "Since the death of my dog, my pipe is the one companion I have left. Naturally I am not allowed to enjoy the honest fellow's society in the presence of ladies. They have their own taste in perfumes. Their clothes and their letters reek with the foetid secretion of the musk-deer. The clean vegetable smell of tobacco is unendurable to them. Allow me to retire—and let me thank you for the trouble you took to save my drawing."

The tone of indifference in which he expressed his gratitude piqued Francine. She resented it by drawing her own conclusion from what he had said of the ladies and the musk-deer. "I was wrong in admiring your drawing," she said; "and wrong again in thinking you a strange man. Am I wrong, for the third time, in believing that you dislike women?"

"I am sorry to say you are right," Alban Morris answered, gravely.

"Is there not even one exception?"

The instant the words passed her lips she saw that there was some secretly sensitive feeling in him which she had hurt. His black brows gathered into a frown, his piercing eyes looked at her with angry surprise. It was over in a moment. He raised his shabby hat and made her a bow.

"There is a sore place still left in me," he said, "and you have innocently hit it. Good-morning." Before she could speak again he had turned the corner of the summer-house, and was lost to view in a shrubbery on the westward side of the grounds.

CHAPTER V.

DISCOVERIES IN THE GARDEN.

LEFT by herself, Miss De Sor turned back again by way of the trees.

So far her interview with the drawing master had helped to pass the time. Some girls might have found it no easy task to arrive at a true view of the character of Alban Morris. Francine's essentially superficial observation set him down as "a little mad," and left him there, judged and dismissed to her entire satisfaction.

Arriving at the lawn, she discovered Emily pacing backward and forward, with her head down and her hands behind her, deep in thought. Francine's high opinion of herself would have carried her past any of the other girls, unless they had made special advances to her. She stopped and looked at Emily.

It is the sad fate of little women in general to grow too fat and to be born with short legs. Emily's slim, finely strung figure spoke for itself as to the first of these misfortunes, and asserted its happy freedom from the second if she only walked across a room. Nature had built her, from head to foot, on a skeleton scaffolding in perfect proportion. Tall or short matters little to the result in women who possess the first and foremost advantage of beginning well in their bones. When they live to old age, they often astonish thoughtless men who walk behind them in the street. "I give you my honor, she was as easy and upright as a young girl; and when you got in front of her, and looked—white hair, and seventy years of age!"

Francine approached Emily, moved by a rare impulse in her nature—the impulse to be sociable. "You look out of spirits," she remarked. "Surely you don't regret leaving school?"

In her present mood, Emily took the opportunity (in the popular phrase) of snubbing Francine. "You have guessed wrong; I do regret," she answered. "I have found in Cecilia my dearest friend at school. And school brought with it the change in my life which has helped me to bear the loss of my father. If you must know what I was thinking of just now, I was thinking of my aunt. She has not answered my last letter, and I am beginning to be afraid she is ill. If you find me in poor spirits, that is the reason."

"I'm very sorry," said Francine.

"Why? You don't know my aunt, and you have only known me since yesterday afternoon. Why are you sorry?"

Francine remained silent. Without realizing it, she was beginning to feel the dominant influence that Emily exercised over the weaker natures that came in contact with her. To find herself irresistibly attracted by a stranger at a new school—an unfortunate little creature, whose destiny was to earn her own living—filled the narrow mind of Miss De Sor with perplexity. Having waited in vain for a reply, Emily turned away, and resumed the train of thought which her school-fellow had interrupted.

By an association of ideas of which she was not herself aware, she now passed from thinking of her aunt to thinking of Miss Jethro. The interview of the previous night had dwelt on her mind at intervals in the hours of the new day.

Acting on instinct rather than on reason, she had kept that remarkable incident in her school life a secret from every one. No discoveries had been made by other persons. In speaking to her staff of teachers, Miss Ladd had alluded to the affair in the most cautious terms. "Circumstances of a private nature have obliged the lady to retire from my school. When we meet after the holidays another teacher will be in her place." There Miss Ladd's explanation had begun and ended. Inquiries addressed to the servants had led to no result. Miss Jethro's luggage was to be forwarded to the London terminus of the railway, and Miss Jethro herself had

baffled investigation by leaving the school on foot. Emily's interest in the lost teacher was not the transitory interest of curiosity; her father's mysterious friend was a person whom she honestly desired to see again. Perplexed by the difficulty of finding a means of tracing Miss Jethro, she reached the shady limit of the trees, and turned to walk back again. Approaching the place at which she and Francine had met, an idea occurred to her. It was just possible that Miss Jethro might not be unknown to her aunt.

Still meditating on the cold reception that she had encountered, and still feeling the influence which mastered her in spite of herself, Francine looked up, and saw Emily approaching. The sense of injury, strong as it was, failed to sustain her. For the first time in her life she was ready to forgive. Interpreting Emily's return as an implied expression of regret, she advanced with a constrained smile, and spoke first.

"How are the young ladies getting on in the school-room?" she asked, by way of renewing the conversation.

Emily's face assumed a look of surprise which said plainly, Can't you take a hint, and leave me to myself?

Francine was constitutionally impenetrable to reproof of this sort: her thick skin was not even tickled. "Why are you not helping them," she went on—"you who have the clearest head among us, and take the lead in everything?"

It may be a humiliating confession to make, yet it is surely true, that we are all accessible to flattery. Different tastes appreciate different methods of burning incense, but the perfume is more or less agreeable to all varieties of noses. Francine's method had its tranquillizing effect on Emily. She answered, indulgently, "My dear, I have nothing to do with it."

"Nothing to do with it? No prizes to win before you leave school?"

"I won all the prizes years ago."

"But there are recitations. Surely you recite?"

Harmless words in themselves, pursuing the same smooth course of flattery as before, but with what a different result! Emily's face reddened with anger the moment they were spoken. Having already irritated Alban Morris, unlucky Francine, by a second mischievous interposition of accident, had succeeded in making Emily smart next. "Who has told you?" she burst out. "I insist on knowing!"

"Nobody has told me anything," Francine declared, piteously.

"Nobody has told you how I have been insulted?"

"No, indeed! Oh, my dear, who could insult *you*?"

In a man, the sense of injury does sometimes submit to the discipline of silence. In a woman—never. Suddenly reminded of her past wrongs (by the pardonable error of a polite school-fellow), Emily committed the startling inconsistency of appealing to the sympathies of Francine!

"Would you believe it? I have been forbidden to recite—I, the head girl of the school. Oh, not to-day! It happened a month ago, when we were all in consultation, making our arrangements. Miss Ladd asked me if I had decided on a piece to recite. I said, 'I have not only decided, I have learned the piece.' 'And what may it be?' 'The dagger scene in *Macbeth*.' There was a howl—I can call it by no other name—a howl of indignation. A man's soliloquy, and, worse still, a murdering man's soliloquy."

equy, recited by one of Miss Ladd's young ladies before an audience of parents and guardians! That was the tone they took with me. I was as firm as a rock. The dagger scene or nothing. The result is—nothing! An insult to Shakspeare, and an insult to me. I felt it; I feel it still. I was prepared for any sacrifice in the cause of the drama. If Miss Ladd had met me in a proper spirit, do you know what I would have done? I would have played Macbeth in costume. Just hear me, and judge for yourself. I begin with a dreadful vacancy in my eyes, and a hollow moaning of my voice, 'Is this a dagger which I see before me—'

Reciting with her face toward the trees, Emily started, dropped the character of Macbeth, and instantly became herself again—herself, with a rising color and an angry brightening of the eyes. "Excuse me; I can't trust my memory; I must get the play." With that abrupt apology, she walked away rapidly in the direction of the house.

In some surprise, Francine turned and looked at the trees. She discovered—in full retreat, on his side—the eccentric drawing master, Alban Morris.

Did he too admire the dagger scene? And was he modestly desirous of hearing it recited without showing himself? In that case, why should Emily (whose besetting weakness was certainly not want of confidence in her own resources) leave the garden the moment she caught sight of him? Francine consulted her instincts. She had just arrived at a conclusion which expressed itself outwardly by a malicious smile, when gentle Cecilia appeared on the lawn—a lovable object in a broad straw hat and a white dress, with a nosegay in her bosom—smiling, and fanning herself.

"It's so hot in the school-room," she said, "and some of the girls, poor things, are so ill-tempered at rehearsal, I have made my escape. I hope you got your breakfast, Miss De Sor. What have you been doing here all by yourself?"

"I have been making an interesting discovery," Francine replied.

"An interesting discovery in our garden? What *can* it be?"

"The drawing master, my dear, is in love with Emily. Perhaps she doesn't care about him. Or perhaps I have been an innocent obstacle in the way of an appointment between them."

Cecilia had breakfasted to her heart's content on her favorite dish—buttered eggs. She was in such good spirits that she was inclined to be coquettish, even when there was no man present to fascinate. "We are not allowed to talk about love in this school," she said, and hid her face behind her fan. "Besides, if it came to Miss Ladd's ears, poor Mr. Morris might lose his situation."

"But isn't it true?" asked Francine.

"It may be true, my dear; but nobody knows. Emily hasn't breathed a word about it to any of us. And Mr. Morris keeps his own secret. Now and then we catch him looking at her, and we draw our own conclusions."

"Did you meet Emily on your way here?"

"Yes; and she passed without speaking to me."

"Thinking, perhaps, of Mr. Morris."

Cecilia shook her head. "Thinking, Francine, of the new life before her, and regretting, I am afraid, that she ever confided her hopes and wishes to me. Did she tell you last night what her prospects are when she leaves school?"

"She told me you had been very kind in helping her. I dare say I should have heard more if I had not fallen asleep. What is she going to do?"

"To live in a dull house, far away in the north," Cecilia answered; "with only old people in it. She will have to write and translate for a great scholar, who is studying mysterious inscriptions—hieroglyphics, I think they are called—found among the ruins of Central America. It's really no laughing matter, Francine. Emily made a joke of it, too. 'I'll take anything but a situation as governess,' she said; 'the children who have Me to teach them would be to be pitied indeed!' She begged and prayed me to help her get an honest living. What could I do? I could only write home to papa. He is a member of Parliament, and everybody who wants a place seems to think he is bound to find it for them. As it happened, he had heard from an old friend of his (a certain Sir Jervis Redwood), who was in search of a secretary. Being in favor of letting the women compete for employment with the men, Sir Jervis was willing to try what he calls 'a female.' Isn't that a horrid way of speaking of us? and Miss Ladd says it's ungrammatical, besides. Papa had written back to say he knew of no lady whom he could recommend. When he got my letter, speaking of Emily, he kindly wrote again. In the interval Sir Jervis had received two applications for the vacant place. They were both from old ladies, and he declined to employ them."

"Because they were old," Francine suggested, maliciously.

"You shall hear him give his own reasons, my dear. Papa sent me an extract from his letter. It made me rather angry; and (perhaps for that reason) I think I can repeat it word for word: 'We are four old people in this house, and we don't want a fifth. Let us have a young one to cheer us. If your daughter's friend likes the terms, and is not encumbered with a sweetheart, I will send for her when the school breaks up at midsummer.' Coarse and selfish—isn't it? However, Emily didn't agree with me when I showed her the extract. She accepted the place, very much to her aunt's surprise and regret, when that excellent person heard of it. Now that the time has come (though Emily won't acknowledge it), I believe she secretly shrinks, poor dear, from the prospect."

"Very likely," Francine agreed, without even a pretense of sympathy.

"But tell me, who are the four old people?"

"First, Sir Jervis himself, seventy last birthday; next, his unmarried sister, nearly eighty; next, his man-servant, Mr. Rook, well past sixty; and last, his man-servant's wife, who considers herself young, being only a little over forty. That is the household. Mrs. Rook is coming to-day to attend Emily on the journey to the north, and I am not at all sure that Emily will like her."

"A disagreeable woman, I suppose?"

"No—not exactly that. Rather odd and flighty. The fact is, Mrs. Rook has had her troubles, and perhaps they have a little unsettled her. She and her husband used to keep the village inn, close to our park; we know all about them at home. I am sure I pity these poor people. What are you looking at, Francine?"

Feeling no sort of interest in Mr. and Mrs. Rook, Francine was studying her school-fellow's lovely face in search of defects. She had already dis-

covered that Cecilia's eyes were placed too wide apart, and that her chin wanted size and character.

"I was admiring your complexion, dear," she answered, coolly. "Well, and why do you pity the Rooks?"

Simple Cecilia smiled, and went on with her story:

"They are obliged to go out to service in their old age, through a misfortune for which they are not to blame. Their customers deserted the inn, and Mr. Rook became bankrupt. The inn got what they call a bad name—in a dreadful way. There was a murder committed in the house."

"A murder!" cried Francine. "Oh, this is exciting! You provoking girl, why didn't you tell me about it before?"

"I didn't think of it," said Cecilia, placidly.

"Do go on! Were you at home when it happened?"

"I was here, at school."

"You saw the newspapers, I suppose?"

"Miss Ladd doesn't allow us to read newspapers. I did hear of it, however, in letters from home. Not that there was much in the letters. They said it was too horrible to be described. The poor murdered gentleman—"

Francine was unaffectedly shocked. "A gentleman!" she exclaimed. "How dreadful!"

"The poor man was a stranger in our part of the country," Cecilia resumed; "and the police were puzzled about the motive for a murder. His pocket-book was missing, but his watch and his rings were found on the body. I remember the initials on his linen because they were the same as my mother's initials before she was married—'J. B.' Really, Francine, that's all I know about it."

"Surely you know whether the murderer was discovered?"

"Oh yes, of course I know that. The government offered a reward; and clever people were sent from London to help the county police. Nothing came of it. The murderer has never been discovered from that time to this."

"When did it happen?"

"It happened in the autumn."

"The autumn of last year?"

"No, no. Nearly four years since."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE WAY TO THE VILLAGE.

ALBAN MORRIS—discovered by Emily in concealment among the trees ~~was~~ not content with retiring to another part of the grounds. He pursued his retreat, careless in what direction it might take him, to a foot-path ~~across~~ the fields, which led to the high-road and the railway station.

Miss Ladd's drawing master was in that state of nervous irritability which seeks relief in rapidity of motion. Public opinion in the neighborhood (especially public opinion among the women) had long since decided that his manners were offensive, and his temper incurably bad. The men who happened to pass him on the foot-path said "Good-morning" grudge-

ingly. The women took no notice of him—with one exception. She was young and saucy, and seeing him walking at the top of his speed on the way to the railway station, she called after him, "Don't be in a hurry, sir; you're in plenty of time for the London train."

To her astonishment he suddenly stopped. His reputation for rudeness was so well established that she moved away to a safe distance before she ventured to look at him again. He took no notice of her; he seemed to be considering with himself. The frolicsome young woman had done him a service: she had suggested an idea.

"Suppose I go to London?" he thought. "Why not? the school is breaking up for the holidays, and *she* is going away like the rest of them." He looked round in the direction of the school-house. "If I go back to wish her good-by, she will keep out of my way, and part with me at the last moment like a stranger. After my experience of women, to be in love again—in love with a girl who is young enough to be my daughter—what a fool, what a drivelling degraded fool, I must be!"

Hot tears rose in his eyes. He dashed them away savagely, and went on again faster than ever, resolved to pack up at once at his lodgings in the village, and to take his departure by the next train.

At the point where the foot-path led into the road he came to a standstill for the second time.

The cause was once more a person of the sex associated in his mind with a bitter sense of injury. On this occasion the person was only a miserable little child, crying over the fragments of a broken jug.

Alban Morris looked at her with his grimly humorous smile. "So you've broken the jug?" he remarked.

"And spilled father's beer," the child answered. Her frail little body shook with terror. "Mother 'll beat me when I go home," she said.

"What does mother do when you bring the jug back safe and sound?" Alban asked.

"Gives me bren-butter."

"Very well. Now listen to me. Mother shall give you bread and butter again this time."

The child stared at him with the tears suspended in her eyes. He went on talking to her as seriously as ever.

"You understand what I have just said to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you got a pocket-handkerchief?"

"No, sir."

"Then dry your eyes with mine."

He tossed his handkerchief to her with one hand, and picked up a fragment of the broken jug with the other. "This will do for a pattern," he said to himself. The child stared at the handkerchief, stared at Alban, took courage, and rubbed vigorously at her eyes. The instinct, which is worth all the reason that ever pretended to enlighten mankind—the instinct that never deceives—told this little ignorant creature that she had found a friend. She returned the handkerchief in grave silence. Alban took her up in his arms.

"Your eyes are dry and your face is fit to be seen," he said. "Will you give me a kiss?" The child gave him a resolute kiss, with a smack

in it. "Now come and get another jug," he said, as he put her down. Her red round eyes opened wide in alarm. "Have you got money enough?" she asked. Alban slapped his pocket. "Yes, I have," he answered. "That's a good thing," said the child; "come along."

They went together hand in hand to the village, and bought the new jug, and had it filled at the beer-shop. The thirsty father was at the upper end of the fields, where they were making a drain. Alban carried the jug until they were within sight of the laborer. "You haven't far to go," he said. "Mind you don't drop it again.—What's the matter now?"

"I'm frightened."

"Why?"

"Oh, give me the jug."

She almost snatched it out of his hand. If she let the precious minutes slip away, there might be another beating in store for her at the drain: her father was not of an indulgent disposition when his children were late in bringing his beer. On the point of hurrying away, without a word of farewell, she remembered the laws of politeness as taught at the infant school, and dropped her little courtesy, and said, "Thank you, sir." That bitter sense of injury was still in Alban's mind as he looked after her. "What a pity she should grow up to be a woman!" he said to himself.

The adventure of the broken jug had delayed his return to his lodgings by more than half an hour. When he reached the road once more the cheap up-train from the north had stopped at the station. He heard the ringing of the bell as it resumed the journey to London.

One of the passengers (judging by the hand-bag that she carried) had not stopped at the village.

As she advanced toward him along the road he remarked that she was a small, wiry, active woman—dressed in bright colors, combined with a deplorable want of taste. Her aquiline nose seemed to be her most striking feature as she came nearer. It might have been fairly proportioned to the rest of her face in her younger days, before her cheeks had lost flesh and roundness. Being probably near-sighted, she kept her eyes half closed: there were cunning little wrinkles at the corners of them. In spite of appearances, she was unwilling to present any outward acknowledgment of the march of time. Her hair was palpably dyed—her hat was jauntily set on her head, and ornamented with a gay feather. She walked with a light, tripping step, swinging her bag, and holding her head up smartly. Her manner, like her dress, said as plainly as words could speak, "No matter how long I may have lived, I mean to be young and charming to the end of my days." To Alban's surprise, she stopped and addressed him.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Could you tell me if I am in the right road to Miss Ladd's school?"

She spoke with nervous rapidity of articulation, and with a singularly unpleasant smile. It parted her thin lips just wide enough to show her suspiciously beautiful teeth, and it opened her keen gray eyes in the strangest manner. The higher lid rose so as to disclose for a moment the upper part of the eyeball, and to give her the appearance—not of a woman bent on making herself agreeable, but of a woman staring in a panic of terror. Careless to conceal the unfavorable impression that she had produced on him, Alban answered, roughly, "Straight on," and tried to pass her.

She stopped him with a peremptory gesture.

"I have treated you politely," she said, "and how do you treat me in return? Well, I am not surprised. Men are all brutes by nature—and you are a man. 'Straight on?'" she repeated, contemptuously; "I should like to know how far that helps a person in a strange place. Perhaps you know no more where Miss Ladd's school is than I do? or perhaps you don't care to take the trouble of directing me? Just what I should have expected from a person of your sex! Good-morning."

Alban felt the reproof: she had appealed to his most readily impressible sense—his sense of humor. He rather enjoyed seeing his own prejudice against women grotesquely reflected in this flighty stranger's prejudice against men. As the best excuse for himself that he could make, he gave her all the information that she could possibly want, then tried again to pass on, and again in vain. He had recovered his place in her estimation: she had not done with him yet.

"You know all about the way there," she said. "I wonder whether you know anything about the school?"

No change in her voice, no change in her manner, betrayed any special motive for putting this question. Alban was on the point of suggesting that she should go on to the school and make her inquiries there, when he happened to notice her eyes. She had hitherto looked him straight in the face. She now looked down on the road. It was a trifling change: in all probability it meant nothing—and yet, merely because it was a change, it roused his curiosity.

"I ought to know something about the school," he answered; "I am one of the masters."

"Then you're just the man I want. May I ask your name?"

"Alban Morris."

"Thank you. I am Mrs. Rook. I presume you have heard of Sir Jervis Redwood?"

"No."

"Bless my soul! You are a scholar, of course, and you have never heard of one of your own trade! Very extraordinary. You see, I am Sir Jervis's housekeeper; and I am sent here to take one of your young ladies back with me to our place. Don't interrupt me! Don't be a brute again! Sir Jervis is not of a communicative disposition. At least not to me. A man—that explains it—a man! He is always poring over his books and writings; and Miss Redwood, at her great age, is in bed half the day. Not a thing do I know about this new inmate of ours, except that I am to take her back with me. You would feel some curiosity yourself in my place, wouldn't you? Now do tell me. What sort of girl is Miss Emily Brown?"

The name that he was perpetually thinking of—on this woman's lips! Alban looked at her.

"Well," said Mrs. Rook, "am I to have no answer? Ah, you want leading. So like a man again! Is she pretty?"

Still examining the housekeeper with mingled feelings of interest and distrust, Alban answered, ungraciously, "Yes."

"Good-tempered?"

Alban again said, "Yes."

"So much about herself," Mrs. Rook, remarked. "About her family

now." She shifted her bag restlessly from one hand to the other. "Perhaps you can tell me if Miss Emily's father"—he suddenly corrected himself—"if Miss Emily's parents are living?"

"I don't know."

"You mean you won't tell me."

"I mean exactly what I have said."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Mrs. Rook rejoined; "I shall find out at the school. The first turning to the left, I think you said—across the fields?"

He was too deeply interested in Emily to let the housekeeper go without putting a question on his side: "Is Sir Jervis Redwood one of Miss Emily's old friends?" he asked.

"He? What put that into your head? He has never even seen Miss Emily. She's going to our house—ah, the women are getting the upper hand now, and serve the men right, I say—she's going to our house to be Sir Jervis's secretary. You would like to have the place yourself, wouldn't you? You would like to keep a poor girl from getting her own living? Oh, you may look as fierce as you please; the time's gone by when a man could frighten me. I like her Christian name. I call Emily a nice name enough. But 'Brown'! Good-morning, Mr. Morris: you and I are not cursed with such a common name as that! 'Brown'! Oh, Lord!"

She tossed her head scornfully, and walked away humming a tune.

Alban stood rooted to the spot. The effort of his later life had been to conceal the hopeless passion which had mastered him in spite of himself. Knowing nothing from Emily—who at once pitied and avoided him—of her family circumstances or of her future plans, he had shrunk from making inquiries of others in the fear that they too might find out his secret, and that their contempt might be added to the contempt which he felt for himself. In this position, and with these obstacles in his way, the announcement of Emily's proposed journey—under the care of a stranger, to fill an employment in the house of a stranger—not only took him by surprise, but inspired him with a strong feeling of distrust. He looked after Sir Jervis Redwood's flighty housekeeper, completely forgetting the purpose which had brought him thus far on the way to his lodgings. Before Mrs. Rook was out of sight, Alban Morris was following her back to the school.

CHAPTER VII.

"COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE."

Miss De Sor and Miss Wyvil were still sitting together under the trees, talking of the murder at the inn.

"And is that really all you can tell me?" said Francine.

"That is all," Cecilia answered.

"Is there no love in it?"

"None that I know of."

"It's the most uninteresting murder that ever was committed. What shall we do with ourselves? I'm tired of being here in the garden. When do the performances in the school-room begin?"

"Not for two hours yet."

Francine yawned. "And what part do you take in it?" she asked.

"No part, my dear. I tried once—only to sing a simple little song. When I found myself standing before all the company, and saw rows of ladies and gentlemen waiting for me to begin, I was so frightened that Miss Ladd had to make an apology for me. I didn't get over it for the rest of the day. For the first time in my life I had no appetite for my dinner. Horrible!" said Cecilia, shuddering over the remembrance of it. "I do assure you I thought I was going to die."

Perfectly unimpressed by this harrowing narrative, Francine turned her head lazily toward the house. The door was thrown open at the same moment. A lithe little person rapidly descended the steps that led to the lawn.

"It's Emily come back again," said Francine.

"And she seems to be rather in a hurry," Cecilia remarked.

Francine's satirical smile showed itself for a moment. Did this appearance of hurry in Emily's movements denote impatience to resume the recital of "the dagger scene"? She had no book in her hand; she never even looked toward Francine. Sorrow became plainly visible in her face as she approached the two girls.

Cecilia rose in alarm. She had been the first person to whom Emily had confided her domestic anxieties. "Bad news from your aunt?" she asked.

"No, my dear; no news at all." Emily put her arms tenderly round her friend's neck. "The time has come, Cecilia," she said. "We must wish each other good-by."

"Is Mrs. Rook here already?"

"It's *you*, dear, who are going," Emily said, sadly. "They have sent the governess to fetch you. Miss Ladd is too busy in the school-room to see her—and she has told me all about it. Don't be alarmed. There is no bad news from home. Your plans are altered; that's all."

"Altered?" Cecilia repeated. "In what way?"

"In a very agreeable way—you are going to travel. Your father wishes you to be in London in time for the evening mail to France."

Cecilia guessed what had happened. "My sister is not getting well," she said; "and the doctors are sending her to the Continent."

"To the baths at St. Moritz," Emily added. "There is only one difficulty in the way of doing so, and you can remove it. Your sister has the good old governess to take care of her, and the courier to relieve her of all trouble on the journey. They were to have started yesterday. You know how fond Julia is of you. At the last moment she won't hear of going away unless you go too. The rooms are waiting at St. Moritz; and your father is annoyed (the governess says) by the delay that has taken place already."

She paused. Cecilia was silent. "Surely you don't hesitate?" Emily said.

"I am too happy to go wherever Julia goes," Cecilia answered, warmly. "I was thinking of you, dear." Her tender nature, shrinking from the hard necessities of life, shrank from the cruelly close prospect of parting. "I thought we were to have had some hours together yet," she said. "Why are we hurried in this way? There is no second train to London from our station till late in the afternoon."

"There is the express," Emily reminded her; "and there is time to catch it, if you drive at once to the town." She took Cecilia's hand, and pressed it to her bosom. "Thank you again and again, dear, for all you have done for me. Whether we meet again or not, as long as I live I shall love you. Don't cry!" She made a faint attempt to resume her customary gayety for Cecilia's sake. "Try to be as hard-hearted as I am. Think of your sister—don't think of me. Only kiss me!"

Cecilia's tears fell fast. "Oh, my love, I am so anxious about you! I am so afraid that you will not be happy with that selfish old man—in that dreary house. Give it up, Emily. I have got plenty of money for both of us; come abroad with me. Why not? You always got on well with Julia when you came to see us in the holidays. Oh, my darling! my darling! What shall I do without you?"

All that longed for love in Emily's nature had clung round her school friend since her father's death. Turning deadly pale under the struggle to control herself, she made the effort—and bore the pain of it without letting a cry or a tear escape her. "Our ways in life lie far apart," she said, gently. "There is the hope of meeting again, dear, if there is nothing more."

The clasp of Cecilia's arms tightened round her. She tried to release herself; but her resolution had reached its limits. Her hands dropped, trembling. She could still try to speak cheerfully, and that was all.

"There is not the least reason, Cecilia, to be anxious about my prospects. I mean to be Sir Jervis Redwood's favorite before I have been a week in his service." She stopped, and pointed to the house. The governess was approaching them. "One more kiss, darling. We shall not forget the happy hours we have spent together; we shall constantly write to each other." She broke down at last. "Oh, Cecilia! Cecilia! leave me, for God's sake—I can't bear it any longer."

The governess parted them. Emily dropped into the chair that her friend had left. Even her hopeful nature sank under the burden of life at that moment.

A hard voice, speaking close at her side, startled her.

"Would you rather be Me," the voice asked, "without a creature to care for you?"

Emily raised her head. Francine, the unnoticed witness of the parting interview, was standing by her, idly picking the leaves from a rose which had dropped out of Cecilia's nosegay.

Had she felt her own isolated position? She had felt it resentfully.

Emily looked at her, with a heart softened by sorrow. There was no answering kindness in the eyes of Miss De Sor—there was only a dogged endurance, sad to see in a creature so young.

"You and Cecilia are going to write to each other," she said. "I suppose there is some comfort in that. When I left the island they were glad to get rid of me. They said, 'Telegraph when you are safe at Miss Ladd's school.' You see, we are so rich the expense of telegraphing to the West Indies is nothing to us. Besides, a telegram has an advantage over a letter—it doesn't take long to read. I dare say I shall write home. But they are in no hurry, and I am in no hurry. The school's breaking up; you are going your way, and I am going mine—and who cares what be-

comes of me? Only an ugly old school-mistress, who is paid for caring. I wonder why I am saying all this? Because I like you? I don't know that I like you any better than you like me. When I wanted to be friends with you, you treated me coolly; I don't want to force myself on you. I don't particularly care about you. May I write to you from Brighton?"

Under all this bitterness—the first exhibition of Francine's temper at its worst which had taken place since she joined the school—Emily saw, or thought she saw, distress that was too proud or too shy to show itself. "How can you ask the question?" she answered, cordially.

Francine was incapable of meeting the sympathy offered to her even half-way. "Never mind how," she said. "Yes or no is all I want from you."

"Oh, Francine! Francine! what are you made of?" she cried. "Flesh and blood? or stone and iron? Write to me, of course, and I will write back again."

"Thank you. Are you going to stay here under the trees?"

"Yes."

"All by yourself?"

"All by myself."

"With nothing to do?"

"I can think of Cecilia."

Francine eyed her with steady attention for a moment.

"Didn't you tell me last night that you were very poor?" she asked.

"I did."

"So poor that you are obliged to earn your own living?"

"Yes."

Francine looked at her again.

"I dare say you won't believe me," she said. "I wish I was you."

She turned away irritably, and walked back to the house.

Were there really longings for kindness and love under the surface of this girl's perverse nature? Or was there nothing to be hoped from a better knowledge of her? In place of tender remembrances of Cecilia, these were the perplexing and unwelcome thoughts which the more potent personality of Francine forced upon Emily's mind.

She rose impatiently, and looked at her watch. When would it be her turn to leave the school, and begin the new life?

Still undecided what to do next, her interest was excited by the appearance of one of the servants on the lawn. The woman rapidly approached her, and presented a visiting-card, bearing on it the name of Sir Jervis Redwood. Beneath the name there was a line written in pencil: "Mrs. Rook, to wait on Miss Emily Brown." The way to the new life was open before her at last!

Looking again at the commonplace announcement contained in the line of writing, she was not quite satisfied. Was it claiming a deference toward herself to which she was not entitled, to expect a letter either from Sir Jervis or from Miss Redwood, giving her some information as to the journey which she was about to undertake, and expressing with some little politeness the wish to make her comfortable in her future home? At any rate, her employer had done her one service, he had reminded her that

her station in life was not what it had been in the days when her father was living, and when her aunt was in affluent circumstances.

She looked up from the card. The servant had gone. Alban Morris was waiting at a little distance—waiting silently until she noticed him.

CHAPTER VIII.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

Emily's impulse was to avoid the drawing master for the second time. The moment afterward a kinder feeling prevailed. The farewell interview with Cecilia had left influences which pleaded for Alban Morris. It was the day of parting good wishes and general separations: he had only perhaps come to say good-by. She advanced to offer her hand, when he stopped her by pointing to Sir Jervis Redwood's card.

"May I say a word, Miss Emily, about that woman?" he asked.

"Do you mean Mrs. Rook?"

"Yes. You know, of course, why she comes here?"

"She comes here, by appointment, to take me to Sir Jervis Redwood's house. Are you acquainted with her?"

"She is a perfect stranger to me. I met her by accident on her way here. If Mrs. Rook had been content with asking me to direct her to the school, I should not be troubling you at this moment. But she forced her conversation on me. And she said something which I think you ought to know. Have you heard of Sir Jervis Redwood's housekeeper before to-day?"

"I have only heard what my friend—Miss Cecilia Wyvil—has told me."

"Did Miss Cecilia tell you that Mrs. Rook was acquainted with your father or with any members of your family?"

"Certainly not."

Alban reflected. "It was natural enough," he resumed, "that Mrs. Rook should feel some curiosity about You. What reason had she for putting a question to me about your father—and putting it in a very strange manner?"

Emily's interest was instantly excited. She led the way back to the seats. "Tell me, Mr. Morris, exactly what the woman said." As she spoke she signed to him to be seated.

Alban observed the natural grace of her action when she set him the example of taking a chair, and the little heightening of her color caused by anxiety to hear what he had still to tell her. Forgetting the restraint that he had hitherto imposed on himself, he enjoyed the luxury of silently admiring her. Her manner betrayed none of the conscious confusion which would have shown itself if her heart had been secretly inclined toward him. She saw the man looking at her. In simple perplexity she looked at the man.

"Are you hesitating on my account?" she asked. "Did Mrs. Rook say something of my father which I mustn't hear?"

"No, no; nothing of the sort."

"You seem to be confused."

Her innocent indifference tried his patience sorely. His memory went

back to the past time—recalled the ill-placed passion of his youth, and the cruel injury inflicted on him: his pride was roused. Was he making himself ridiculous? The vehement throbbing of his heart almost suffocated him. And there she sat, wondering at his odd behavior. "Even this girl is as cold-blooded as the rest of her sex." That angry thought gave him back his self-control. He made his excuses with the easy politeness of a man of the world.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Emily; I was considering how to put what I have to say in the fewest and plainest words. Let me try if I can do it. If Mrs. Rook had merely asked me whether your father and mother were living, I should have attributed the question to the commonplace curiosity of a gossiping woman, and have thought no more of it. What she actually did say was this: 'Perhaps you can tell me if Miss Emily's father—' There she checked herself, and suddenly altered the question in this way, 'if Miss Emily's *parents* are living?' I may be making mountains out of mole-hills; but I thought at the time (and think still) that she had some special interest in inquiring after your father, and, not wishing me to notice it for reasons of her own, changed the form of the question so as to include your mother. Does this strike you as a far-fetched conclusion?"

"Whatever it may be," Emily said, "it is my conclusion too. How did you answer her?"

"Quite easily. I could give her no information, and I said so."

"Let me offer you the information, Mr. Morris, before we say anything more. I have lost both my parents."

Alban's momentary outbreak of irritability was at an end. He was earnest and yet gentle again; he forgave her for not understanding how dear and how delightful to him she was. "Will it distress you," he said, "if I ask how long it is since your father died?"

"Nearly four years," she replied. "He was the most generous of men; Mrs. Rook's interest in him may surely have been a grateful interest. He may have been kind to her in past years—and she may remember him thankfully. Don't you think so?"

Alban was unable to agree with her. "If Mrs. Rook's interest in your father was the harmless interest that you have suggested," he said, "why should she have checked herself in that unaccountable manner when she first asked me if he was living? The more I think of it now, the less sure I feel that she knows anything at all of your family history. It may help me to decide if you will tell me at what time the death of your mother took place."

"So long ago," Emily replied, "that I can't even remember her death. I was an infant at the time."

"And yet Mrs. Rook asked me if your 'parents' were living! One of two things," Alban concluded. "Either there is some mystery in this matter, which we can not hope to penetrate at present, or Mrs. Rook may have been speaking at random on the chance of discovering whether you are related to some 'Mr. Brown' whom she once knew."

"Besides," Emily added, "it's only fair to remember what a common family name mine is, and how easily people may make mistakes. I should like to know if my dear lost father was really in her mind when she spoke to you. Do you think I could find it out?"

"If Mrs. Rook has any reasons for concealment, I believe you would have no chance of finding it out—unless, indeed, you could take her by surprise."

"In what way, Mr. Morris?"

"Only one way occurs to me just now," he said. "Do you happen to have a miniature or a photograph of your father?"

Emily held out a handsome locket, with a monogram in diamonds, attached to her watch chain. "I have his photograph here," she rejoined, "given to me by my dear old aunt in the days of her prosperity. Shall I show it to Mrs. Rook?"

"Yes, if she happens, by good luck, to offer you an opportunity. In any other case (unless I am completely mistaken in the impression which she has produced on me) you might only encourage her to deceive you."

Impatient to try the experiment, Emily rose as he spoke. "I mustn't keep Mrs. Rook waiting," she said.

Alban stopped her on the point of leaving him. The confusion and hesitation which she had already noticed began to show themselves in his manner once more.

"Miss Emily, may I ask a favor before you go? I am only one of the masters employed in the school; but I don't think—let me say, I hope I am not guilty of presumption—if I offer to be of some small service to one of my pupils—"

There his embarrassment mastered him. He despised himself not only for yielding to his own weakness, but for faltering like a fool in the expression of a simple request. The next words died away on his lips.

This time Emily understood him.

The subtle penetration which had long since led her to the discovery of his secret—overpowered, thus far, by the absorbing interest of the moment—now recovered its activity. In an instant she remembered that Alban's motive for cautioning her, in her coming intercourse with Mrs. Rook, was not the merely friendly motive which might have actuated him in the case of one of the other girls. At the same time her quickness of apprehension warned her not to risk encouraging this persistent lover by betraying any embarrassment on her side. He was evidently anxious to be present (in her interests) at the interview with Mrs. Rook. Why not? His experience of the housekeeper—to say nothing of his experience of the world—might be of the greatest use to her in an emergency. Could he afterward reproach her with cruelly raising false hopes if she accepted his services under circumstances of doubt and difficulty which he had himself been the first to point out? He could do nothing of the sort. Without waiting until he had recovered himself, she answered him (to all appearance) as composedly as if he had spoken to her in the plainest terms.

"After all that you have told me," she said, "I shall indeed feel obliged if you will be present when I see Mrs. Rook."

The eager brightening of his eyes, the flush of happiness that made him look young on a sudden, were signs not to be mistaken. The sooner they were in the presence of a third person (Emily privately concluded), the better it might be for both of them. She led the way rapidly to the house.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. ROOK AND THE LOCKET.

As mistress of a prosperous school, bearing a widely extended reputation, Miss Ladd prided herself on the liberality of her household arrangements. At breakfast and dinner not only the solid comforts but the elegant luxuries of the table were set before the young ladies. "Other schools may, and no doubt do, offer to pupils the affectionate care to which they have been accustomed under the parents' roof," Miss Ladd used to say. "At my school that care extends to their meals, and provides them with a *cuisine* which, I flatter myself, equals the most successful efforts of the cooks at home." Fathers, mothers, and friends, when they paid visits to this excellent lady, brought away with them the most gratifying recollections of her hospitality. The men, in particular, seldom failed to recognize in their hostess the rarest virtue that a single lady can possess—the virtue of putting wine on her table which may be gratefully remembered by her guests the next morning.

An agreeable surprise awaited Mrs. Rook when she entered the house of bountiful Miss Ladd.

Arriving in the character of Sir Jervis Redwood's confidential emissary—intrusted with the care of the most intelligent and most popular pupil in the school—Mrs. Rook found a reception worthy of her pretensions. Luncheon was ready for her in the waiting-room. Detained at the final rehearsals of music and recitation, Miss Ladd was worthily represented by cold chicken and ham, a fruit tart, and a pint decanter of generous sherry. "Your mistress is a perfect lady," Mrs. Rook said to the servant, with a burst of enthusiasm. "I can carve for myself, thank you; and I don't care how long Miss Emily keeps me waiting."

As they ascended the steps leading into the house, Alban asked Emily if he might look again at her locket.

"Shall I open it for you?" she suggested.

"No; I only want to look at the outside of it."

He examined the side on which the monogram appeared, inlaid with diamonds. An inscription was engraved beneath. "May I read it?" he said.

"Certainly."

The inscription ran thus: "In loving memory of my father. Died 30th September, 1877."

"Can you arrange the locket," Alban asked, "so that the side on which the diamonds appear hangs outward?"

She understood him. The diamonds might attract Mrs. Rook's notice; and, in that case, she might ask to see the locket of her own accord. "You are beginning to be of use to me already," Emily said, as they turned into the corridor which led to the waiting-room.

They found Sir Jervis's housekeeper luxuriously recumbent in the easiest chair in the room.

Of the eatable part of the lunch some relics were yet left. In the pint decanter of sherry not a drop remained. The genial influence of the wine (hastened by the hot weather) was visible in Mrs. Rook's flushed face and in a special development of her ugly smile. Her widening lips stretched to new lengths; and the white upper line of her eyeballs was more freely and horribly visible than ever.

"And this is the dear young lady?" she said, lifting her hands in over-acted admiration. At the first greetings Alban perceived that the impression produced was, in Emily's case as in his case, instantly unfavorable.

The servant came in to clear the table. Emily stepped aside for a minute to give some directions about her luggage. In that interval Mrs. Rook's cunning little eyes turned on Alban with an expression of malicious scrutiny.

"You were walking the other way," she whispered, "when I met you." She stopped, and glanced over her shoulder at Emily. "I see what attraction has brought you back to the school. Steal your way into that poor little fool's heart, and then make her miserable for the rest of her life!—No need, miss, to hurry," she said, shifting the polite side of her toward Emily, who returned at the moment. "The visits of the trains to your station here are like the visits of the angels described by the poet, 'few and far between.' Please excuse the quotation. You wouldn't think it to look at me—I'm a great reader."

"Is it a long journey to Sir Jervis Redwood's house?" Emily asked, at a loss what else to say to a woman who was already becoming unendurable to her.

Mrs. Rook looked at the journey from an oppressively cheerful point of view.

"Oh, Miss Emily, you sha'n't feel the time hang heavy in my company. I can converse on a variety of topics, and if there is one thing more than another that I like, it's amusing a pretty young lady. You think me a strange creature, don't you? It's only my high spirits. Nothing strange about me, unless it's my queer Christian name. You look a little dull, my dear. Shall I begin amusing you before we are on the railway? Shall I tell you how I came by my queer name?"

Thus far Alban had controlled himself. This last specimen of the housekeeper's audacious familiarity reached the limits of his endurance.

"We don't care to know how you came by your name," he said.

"Rude," Mrs. Rook remarked, composedly. "But nothing surprises me coming from a man."

She turned to Emily. "My father and mother were a wicked married couple," she continued, "before I was born. They 'got religion,' as the saying is, at a Methodist meeting in a field. When I came into the world—I don't know how you feel, miss; I protest against being brought into the world without asking my leave first—my mother was determined to dedicate me to piety before I was out of my long clothes. What name do you suppose she had me christened by? She chose it, or made it, herself—the name of 'Righteous'—Righteous Rook! Was there ever a poor baby degraded by such a ridiculous name before? It's needless to say when I write letters I sign R. Rook, and leave people to think it's Rosamond, or

Rosabelle, or something sweetly pretty of that kind. You should have seen my husband's face when he first heard that his sweetheart's name was 'Righteous.' He was on the point of kissing me, and he stopped. I dare say he felt sick. Perfectly natural under the circumstances."

Alban tried to stop her again. "What time does the train go?" he asked.

Emily entreated him to restrain himself, by a look. Mrs. Rook was still too inveterately amiable to take offense. She opened her travelling bag briskly, and placed a railway guide in Alban's hands.

"I've heard that the women do the men's work in foreign parts," she said. "But this is England, and I am an English woman. Find out when the train goes, my dear sir, for yourself."

Alban at once consulted the guide. If there proved to be no immediate need of starting for the station, he was determined that Emily should not be condemned to pass the interval in the housekeeper's company. In the mean time Mrs. Rook was as eager as ever to show her dear young lady what an amusing companion she could be.

"Talking of husbands," she resumed, "don't make the mistake, my dear, that I committed. Beware of letting anybody persuade you to marry an old man. Mr. Rook is old enough to be my father. I bear with him. Of course I bear with him. At the same time, I have not (as the poet says) 'passed through the ordeal unscathed.' My spirit—I have long since ceased to believe in anything of the sort; I only use the word for want of a better—my spirit, I say, has become embittered. I was once a pious young woman; I do assure you I was nearly as good as my name. Don't let me shock you; I have lost faith and hope; I have become—what's the last new name for a freethinker? Oh, I keep up with the times, thanks to old Miss Redwood! She takes in the newspapers, and makes me read them to her. What *is* the new name? Something ending in ic. Bombastic? No. Agnostic?—that's it! I have become an Agnostic. The inevitable result of marrying an old man; if there's any blame, it rests on my husband."

"There's more than an hour yet before the train starts," Alban interposed. "I am sure, Miss Emily, you would find it pleasanter to wait in the garden."

"Not at all a bad notion," Mrs. Rook declared. "Here's a man who can make himself useful, for once. Let's go into the garden."

She rose, and led the way to the door. Alban seized the opportunity of whispering to Emily.

"Did you notice the empty decanter when we first came in? That horrid woman is drunk."

Emily pointed significantly to the locket. "Don't let her go! The garden will distract her attention; keep her near me here."

Mrs. Rook gayly opened the door. "Take me to the flower beds," she said. "I believe in nothing—but I adore flowers."

"You'll find it too hot in the garden," Alban said, roughly.

Mrs. Rook waited at the door, with her eye on Emily. "What do *you* say, miss?"

"I think we shall be more comfortable if we stay where we are."

"Whatever pleases you, my dear, pleases me." With this reply, the

compliant housekeeper—as amiable as ever on the surface—returned to her chair.

Would she notice the locket as she sat down? Emily turned toward the window, so as to let the light fall on the diamonds.

No; Mrs. Rook was absorbed, at the moment, in her own reflections. Miss Emily having prevented her from seeing the garden, she was maliciously bent on disappointing Miss Emily in return. Sir Jervis's secretary (being young) took a hopeful view, no doubt, of her future prospects. Mrs. Rook decided on darkening that view in a mischievously suggestive manner peculiar to herself.

"You will naturally feel some curiosity about your new home," she began, "and I haven't said a word about it yet. How very thoughtless of me! Inside and out, dear Miss Emily, our house is just a little dull. I say *our* house, and why not, when the management of it is all thrown on me? We are built of stone, and we are much too long, and not half high enough. Our situation is on the coldest side of the county, away in the west. We are close to the Cheviot Hills; and if you fancy there is anything to see when you look out of window, except sheep, you will find yourself woefully mistaken. As for walks, if you go out on one side of the house you may or may not be gored by cattle. On the other side, if the darkness overtakes you, you may or may not tumble down a deserted lead mine. But the company inside the house makes amends for it all," Mrs. Rook proceeded, enjoying the expression of dismay which was beginning to show itself on Emily's face. "Plenty of excitement for you, my dear, in our small family. Sir Jervis will introduce you to plaster casts of hideous Indian idols; he will keep you writing for him, without mercy, from morning to night; and when he does let you go, old Miss Redwood will find she can't sleep, and will send for the pretty young lady secretary to read to her. My husband, I am sure, you will like. He is a respectable man, and bears the highest character. Next to the idols, he's the most hideous object in the house. If you are good enough to encourage him, I don't say that he won't amuse you; he will tell you, for instance, he never in his life hated any human being as he hates his wife. By-the-way, I must not forget—in the interests of truth, you know—to mention one drawback that does exist in our domestic circle. One of these days we shall have our brains blown out or our throats cut. Sir Jervis's mother left him ten thousand pounds' worth of precious stones, all contained in a little cabinet with drawers. He won't let the banker take care of his jewels; he won't sell them; he won't even wear one of the rings on his finger, or one of the pins at his breast. He keeps the cabinet on his dressing-room table, and he says, 'I like to gloat over my jewels every night before I go to bed.' Ten thousand pounds' worth of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and what not, at the mercy of the first robber who happens to hear of them! Oh, my dear, he would have no choice, I do assure you, but to use his pistols. We shouldn't quietly submit to be robbed. Sir Jervis inherits the spirit of his ancestors. My husband has the temper of a gamecock. I myself, in defense of the property of my employers, am capable of becoming a perfect fiend. And we none of us understand the use of fire-arms."

While she was in full enjoyment of this last aggravation of the horrors

of the prospect, Emily tried another change of position, and this time with success. Greedy admiration suddenly opened Mrs. Rook's little eyes to their utmost width. "My heart alive, miss! what do I see at your watch chain? How they sparkle! Might I ask for a closer view?"

Emily's fingers trembled, but she succeeded in detaching the locket from the chain. Alban handed it to Mrs. Rook.

She began by admiring the diamonds, with a certain reserve. "Nothing like so large as Sir Jervis's diamonds, but choice specimens, no doubt. Might I ask what the value—"

She stopped. The inscription had attracted her notice; she began to read it aloud: "In loving memory of my father. Died—"

Her face instantly became rigid. The next words were suspended on her lips.

Alban seized the chance of making her betray herself, under pretense of helping her. "Perhaps you find the figures not easy to read," he said. "The date is 'thirtieth September, eighteen hundred and seventy-seven'—nearly four years since."

Not a word, not a movement, escaped Mrs. Rook. She held the locket before her as she had held it from the first.

Alban looked at Emily. Her eyes were riveted on the housekeeper; she was barely capable of preserving the appearance of composure. Seeing the necessity of acting for her, he at once said the words which she was unable to say for herself.

"Perhaps, Mrs. Rook, you would like to look at the portrait?" he suggested. "Shall I open the locket for you?"

Without speaking, or looking up, she handed it to Alban. He opened it, and offered it to her. She neither accepted nor refused it; her hands remained hanging over the arms of the chair. He put the locket on her lap.

The portrait produced no marked effect on Mrs. Rook. Had the date prepared her to see it? She sat looking at it, still without moving, still without saying a word. Alban had no mercy on her. "That is the portrait of Miss Emily's father," he said. "Does it represent the same Mr. Brown whom you had in your mind when you asked me if Miss Emily's father was still living?"

That question roused her. She looked up on the instant; she answered, loudly and insolently, "No!"

"And yet," Alban persisted, "you broke down in reading the inscription; and considering what a talkative woman you are, the portrait has had a strange effect on you, to say the least of it."

She eyed him steadily while he was speaking, and turned to Emily when he had done. "You mentioned the heat just now, miss. The heat has overcome me; I shall soon get right again."

The insolent futility of that excuse irritated Emily into answering her. "You will get right again perhaps all the sooner," she said, "if we trouble you with no more questions, and leave you to recover by yourself."

The first change of expression which relaxed the iron tensiety of the housekeeper's face showed itself when she heard that reply. At last there was a feeling in Mrs. Rook which openly declared itself—a feeling of impatience to see Alban and Emily leave the room.

They left her, without a word more.

CHAPTER X.

GUESSES AT THE TRUTH.

"WHAT are we to do next? Oh, Mr. Morris, you must have seen all sorts of people in your time—you know human nature, and I don't. Help me with a word of advice!"

Emily forgot that he was in love with her—forgot everything but the effect produced by the locket on Mrs. Rook, and the vaguely alarming conclusion to which it pointed. In the fervor of her anxiety she took Alban's arm as familiarly as if he had been her brother. He was gentle, he was considerate; he tried earnestly to compose her. "We can do nothing to any good purpose," he said, "unless we begin by thinking quietly. Pardon me for saying so—you are needlessly exciting yourself."

There was a reason for her excitement, of which he was necessarily ignorant. Her memory of the night interview with Miss Jethro had inevitably intensified the suspicion inspired by the conduct of Mrs. Rook. In less than twenty-four hours Emily had seen two women shrinking from secret remembrances of her father, which might well be guilty remembrances, innocently excited by herself! How had they injured him? Of what infamy on their parts did his beloved and stainless memory remind them? Who could fathom the mystery of it? "What does it mean?" she cried, looking wildly in Alban's compassionate face. "You *must* have formed some idea of your own. What does it mean?"

"Come and sit down, Miss Emily. We will try if we can find out what it means together."

They returned to the shady solitude under the trees. Away in front of the house the distant grating of carriage wheels told of the arrival of Miss Ladd's guests, and of the speedy beginning of the entertainments and ceremonies of the day.

"We must help each other," Alban resumed. "When we first spoke of Mrs. Rook, you mentioned Miss Cecilia Wyvil as a person who knew something about her. Have you any objection to tell me what you may have heard in that way?"

In complying with his request Emily necessarily repeated what Cecilia had told Francine, when the two girls had met that morning in the garden.

Alban now knew how Emily had obtained employment as Sir Jervis's secretary; how Mr. and Mrs. Rook had been previously known to Cecilia's father as respectable people keeping an inn in his own neighborhood; and finally how they had been obliged to begin life again in domestic service because the terrible event of a murder had given the inn a bad name, and had driven away the customers on whose encouragement their business depended.

Listening in silence, Alban remained silent when Emily's narrative had come to an end.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" she asked.

"I am thinking over what I have just heard," he answered.

Emily noticed a certain formality in his tone and manner, which disagreeably surprised her. He seemed to have made his reply as a mere concession to politeness, while he was thinking of something else which really interested him.

"Have I disappointed you in any way?" she asked.

"On the contrary, you have interested me. I want to be quite sure that I remember exactly what you have said. You mentioned, I think, that your friendship with Miss Cecilia Wyvil began here, at the school?"

"Yes."

"And in speaking of the murder at the village inn, you told me that the crime was committed—I have forgotten how long ago?"

His manner still suggested that he was idly talking about what she had told him, while some more important subject for reflection was in possession of his mind.

"I don't know that I said anything about the time that had passed since the crime was committed," she answered, sharply. "What does the murder matter to *us*? I think Cecilia told me it happened about four years since. Excuse me for noticing it, Mr. Morris—you seem to have some interests of your own to occupy your attention. Why couldn't you say so plainly when we came out here? I should not have asked you to help me, in that case. Since my poor father's death I have been used to fight through my troubles by myself."

She rose, and looked at him proudly. The next moment her eyes filled with tears.

In spite of her resistance, Alban took her hand. "Dear Miss Emily," he said, "you distress me. You have not done me justice. Your interests only are in my mind. I have been thinking of the one question that perplexes us both—the question of Mrs. Rook."

Answering her in those terms, he had not spoken as frankly as usual. He had only told her a part of the truth.

Hearing that the woman whom they had just left had been landlady of an inn, and that a murder had been committed under her roof, he was led to ask himself if any explanation might be found, in these circumstances, of the otherwise incomprehensible effect produced on Mrs. Rook by the inscription on the locket.

In the pursuit of this inquiry there had arisen in his mind a monstrous suspicion, which pointed to Mrs. Rook. It impelled him to ascertain the date at which the murder had been committed, and (if the discovery encouraged further investigation) to find out next the manner of Mr. Brown's death. In yielding to his own morbid curiosity he had made his inquiries with anxious consideration for Emily, using such precautions and evasions as would prevent her from even suspecting the inferences to which her information might innocently lead.

Thus far, what progress had he made? He had discovered that the date of Mr. Brown's death inscribed on the locket and the date of the crime committed at the inn approached each other nearly enough to justify further investigation.

In the mean time, had he succeeded in keeping his object concealed from Emily? He had perfectly succeeded. Hearing him declare that her in-

terests only had occupied his mind, the poor girl innocently entreated him to forgive her little outbreak of temper. "If you have any more questions to ask me, Mr. Morris, pray go on. I promise never to think unjustly of you again."

He went on, with an uneasy conscience—for it seemed cruel to deceive her, even in the interests of truth—but still he went on.

"We must be content to guess on the chance of finding out the truth," he resumed, carefully approaching the end that he had in view. "I will set the example, if you like. Suppose we assume that this woman has injured your father in some way. Am I right in believing that it was in his character to forgive injuries?"

"Entirely right."

"In that case his death may have left Mrs. Rook in a position to be called to account by those who owe a duty to his memory—I mean the surviving members of his family."

"There are but two of us, Mr. Morris: my aunt and myself."

"There are his executors."

"My aunt is his only executor."

"Your father's sister, I presume?"

"Yes."

"He may have left instructions with her which might be of the greatest use to us."

"I will write to-day and find out," Emily replied. "I had already planned to consult my aunt," she added, thinking again of Miss Jethro.

"If your aunt has not received any positive instructions," Alban continued, "she may remember some allusion to Mrs. Rook, on your father's part, at the time of his last illness—"

Emily stopped him. "You don't know how my dear father died," she said. "He was struck down—apparently in perfect health—by disease of the heart."

"Struck down in his own house?"

"Yes—in his own house."

Those words closed Alban's lips. The investigation, so carefully and so delicately conducted, had failed to serve any useful purpose. He had now ascertained the manner of Mr. Brown's death and the place of Mr. Brown's death—and he was as far from confirming his suspicions of Mrs. Rook as ever.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DRAWING MASTER'S CONFESSION.

"Is there nothing else you can suggest?" Emily asked.

"Nothing—at present."

"If my aunt fails us, have we no other hope?"

"I have hope in Mrs. Rook," Alban answered. "I see I surprise you; but I really mean what I say. Sir Jervis's housekeeper is an excitable woman, and she is fond of wine. There is always a weak side in the character of such a person as that. If we wait for our chance, and turn it to the right use when it comes, we may yet succeed in making her betray herself."

Emily listened to him in bewilderment.

"You talk as if I was sure of your help in the future," she said. "Have you forgotten that I leave school to-day, never to return? In half an hour more I shall be condemned to a long journey in the company of that horrible creature—with a life to look forward to in the same house with her, among strangers! A miserable prospect, and a hard trial of a girl's courage—is it not, Mr. Morris?"

"You will at least have one person, Miss Emily, who will try with all his heart and soul to encourage you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Alban, quietly, "that the midsummer vacation begins to-day, and that the drawing master is going to spend his holidays in the North."

Emily jumped up from her chair. "You!" she exclaimed—"you are going to Northumberland with me!"

"Why not?" Alban asked. "The railway is open to all travellers alike, if they have money enough to buy a ticket."

"Mr. Morris, what *can* you be thinking of? Indeed, indeed, I am not ungrateful. I know you mean kindly—you are a good, generous man. But do remember how completely a girl in my position is at the mercy of appearances. You, travelling in the same carriage with me! and that woman putting her own vile interpretation on it, and degrading me in Sir Jervis Redwood's estimation on the day when I enter his house! Oh, it's worse than thoughtless—it's madness, down-right madness."

"You are quite right," Alban gravely agreed. "It is madness. I lost whatever little reason I once possessed, Miss Emily, on the day when I first met you out walking with the young ladies of the school."

Emily turned away in significant silence. Alban followed her.

"You promised just now," he said, "never to think unjustly of me again. I respect and admire you far too sincerely to take a base advantage of this occasion—the only occasion on which I have been permitted to speak with you alone. Wait a little before you condemn a man whom you don't understand. I will say nothing to annoy you—I only ask leave to explain myself. Will you take your chair again?"

She returned unwillingly to her seat. "It can only end," she thought, sadly, "in my disappointing him."

"I have had the worst possible opinion of women for years past," Alban resumed; "and the only reason I can give for it condemns me out of my own mouth. I have been infamously treated by one woman, and my wounded self-esteem has meanly revenged itself by reviling the whole sex. Wait a little, Miss Emily. My fault has received its fit punishment. I have been thoroughly humiliated, and *you* have done it."

"Mr. Morris!"

"Take no offense, pray, where no offense is meant. Some few years since it was the great misfortune of my life to meet with a Jilt. You know what I mean?"

"Yes."

"She was my equal by birth (I am a younger son of a country squire) and my superior in rank. I can honestly tell you that I was fool enough to love her with all my heart and soul. She never allowed me to doubt—

I may say this without conceit, remembering the miserable end of it—that my feeling for her was returned. Her father and mother (excellent people) approved of the contemplated marriage. She accepted my presents; she allowed all the customary preparations for a wedding to proceed to completion; she had not even mercy enough, or shame enough, to prevent me from publicly degrading myself by waiting for her at the altar, in the presence of a large congregation. The minutes passed, and no bride appeared. The clergyman, waiting like me, was requested to return to the vestry. I was invited to follow him. You foresee the end of the story, of course? She had run away with another man. But can you guess who the man was? Her groom."

Emily's face reddened with indignation. "She suffered for it? Oh, Mr. Morris, surely she suffered for it!"

"Not at all. She had money enough to reward the groom for marrying her; and she let herself down easily to her husband's level. It was a suitable marriage in every respect. When I last heard of them they were regularly in the habit of getting drunk together. I am afraid I have disgusted you? We will drop the subject, and resume my precious autobiography at a later date. One showery day in the autumn of last year you young ladies went out with Miss Ladd for a walk. When you were all trotting back again, under your umbrellas, did you (in particular) notice an ill-tempered fellow standing in the road, and getting a good look at you, on the high foot-path above him?"

Emily smiled, in spite of herself. "I don't remember it," she said.

"You wore a brown jacket which fitted you as if you had been born in it, and you had the smartest little straw hat I ever saw on a woman's head. It was the first time I ever noticed such things. I think I could paint a portrait of the boots you wore (nude included) from memory alone. That was the impression you produced on me. After believing, honestly believing, that love was one of the lost illusions of my life—after feeling, honestly feeling, that I would as soon look at the devil as look at a woman—there was the state of mind to which retribution had reduced me, using for its instrument Miss Emily Brown. Oh, don't be afraid of what I may say next! In your presence, and out of your presence, I'm man enough to be ashamed of my own folly. I am resisting your influence over me at this moment with the strongest of all resolutions—the resolution of despair. Let's look at the humorous side of the story again. What do you think I did when the regiment of young ladies had passed by me?"

Emily declined to guess.

"I followed you back to the school; and, on pretense of having a daughter to educate, I got one of Miss Ladd's prospectuses from the porter at the lodge gate. I was in your neighborhood, you must know, on a sketching tour. I went back to my inn, and seriously considered what had happened to me. The result of my cogitations was that I went abroad. Only for a change—not at all because I was trying to weaken the impression you had produced on me! After a while I returned to England. Only because I was tired of travelling—not at all because your influence drew me back! Another interval passed; and luck turned my way, for a wonder. The drawing master's place became vacant here. Miss Ladd advertised; I produced my testimonials, and took the situation. Only because the salary was a wel-

come certainty to a poor man—not at all because the new position brought me into personal association with Miss Emily Brown! Do you begin to see why I have troubled you with all this talk about myself? Apply the contemptible system of self-delusion which my confession has revealed, to that holiday arrangement for a tour in the north which has astonished and annoyed you. I am going to travel this afternoon by your train. Only because I feel an intelligent longing to see the northernmost county of England—not at all because I won't let you trust yourself alone with Mrs. Rook! Not at all because I won't leave you to enter Sir Jervis Redwood's service without a friend within reach in case you want him! Mad? Oh yes—perfectly mad. But tell me this: what do all sensible people do when they find themselves in the company of a lunatic? They humor him. Let me take your ticket, and see your luggage labelled: I only ask leave to be your travelling servant. If you are proud—I shall like you all the better if you are—pay me wages and keep me in my proper place in that way."

Some girls, addressed with this reckless intermingling of jest and earnest, would have felt confused, and some would have felt flattered. With a good-tempered resolution, which never passed the limits of modesty and refinement, Emily met Alban Morris on his own ground.

"You have said you respect me," she began; "I am going to prove that I believe you. The least I can do is not to misinterpret you, on my side. Am I to understand, Mr. Morris—you won't think the worse of me, I hope, if I speak plainly—am I to understand that you are in love with me?"

"Yes, Miss Emily—if you please."

He had answered with the quaint gravity which was peculiar to him; but he was already conscious of a sense of discouragement. Her composure was a bad sign—from his point of view.

"My time will come, I dare say," she proceeded. "At present I know nothing of love by experience; I only know what some of my school-fellows talk about in secret. Judging by what they tell me, a girl blushes when her lover pleads with her to favor his addresses. Am I blushing?"

"Must I speak plainly too?" Alban asked.

"If you have no objection," she answered, as composedly as if she had been speaking to her grandfather.

"Then, Miss Emily, I must say—you are not blushing."

She went on. "Another token of love—as I am informed—is to tremble. Am I trembling?"

"No."

"Am I too confused to look at you?"

"No."

"Do I walk away with dignity, and then stop and steal a timid glance at my lover over my shoulder?"

"I wish you did!"

"A plain answer, Mr. Morris. Yes or No."

"No—of course."

"In one last word, do I give you any sort of encouragement to try again?"

"In one last word, I have made a fool of myself, and you have taken the kindest possible way of telling me so."

This time she made no attempt to reply in his own tone. The good-

humored gayety of her manner disappeared. She was in earnest—truly, sadly in earnest—when she said her next words.

"Is it not best, in your own interests, that we should bid each other good-by?" she asked. "In the time to come—when you only remember how kind you once were to me—we may look forward to meeting again. After all that you have suffered, so bitterly and so undeservedly, don't, pray don't, make me feel that another woman has behaved cruelly to you, and that I—so grieved to distress you—am that heartless creature!"

Never in her life had she been so irresistibly charming as she was at that moment. Her sweet nature showed all its innocent pity for him in her face.

He saw it—he felt it—he was not unworthy of it. In silence he lifted her hand to his lips. He turned pale as he kissed it.

"Say that you agree with me!" she pleaded.

"I obey you."

As he answered he pointed to the lawn at their feet. "Look," he said, "at that dead leaf which the air is wafting over the grass. Is it possible that such sympathy as you feel for Me, such love as I feel for You, can waste, wither, and fall to the ground like that leaf? I leave you, Emily, with the firm conviction that there is a time of fulfillment to come in our two lives. Happen what may in the interval—I trust the future."

The words had barely passed his lips when the voice of one of the servants reached them from the house. "Miss Emily! are you in the garden?"

Emily stepped out into the sunshine. The servant hurried to meet her, and placed a telegram in her hand. She looked at it with a sudden misgiving. In her small experience a telegram was associated with the communication of bad news. She conquered her hesitation—opened it—read it. The color left her face: she shuddered. The telegram dropped on the grass.

"Read it," she said, faintly, as Alban picked it up.

He read these words: "Come to London directly. Miss Letitia is dangerously ill."

"Your aunt?" he asked.

"Yes—my aunt."

BOOK THE SECOND.—IN LONDON.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. ELLMOTHER.

THE metropolis of Great Britain is, in certain respects, like no other metropolis on the face of the earth. In the population that throngs the streets the extremes of Wealth and the extremes of Poverty meet as they meet nowhere else. In the streets themselves the glory and the shame of architecture—the mansion and the hovel—are neighbors in situation as they are neighbors nowhere else. London, in its social aspect, is the city of contrasts.

Toward the close of the evening Emily left the railway terminus for the place of residence in which loss of fortune had compelled her aunt to take refuge. As she approached her destination, the cab passed—by merely crossing a road—from a spacious and beautiful park, with its surrounding houses topped by statues and cupolas, to a row of cottages hard by a stinking ditch misnamed a canal. The city of contrasts: north and south, east and west, the city of social contrasts.

Emily stopped the cab before the garden gate of a cottage at the further end of the row. The bell was answered by the one servant now in her aunt's employment—Miss Letitia's maid.

Personally this good creature was one of the ill-fated women whose appearance suggests that Nature intended to make men of them, and altered her mind at the last moment. Miss Letitia's maid was tall and gaunt and awkward. The first impression produced by her face was an impression of bones. They rose high on her forehead, they projected on her cheeks, and they reached their boldest development in her jaws. In the cavernous eyes of this unfortunate person rigid obstinacy and rigid goodness looked out together, with equal severity, on all her fellow-creatures alike. Her mistress (whom she had served for a quarter of a century and more) called her "Bony." She accepted this cruelly appropriate nickname as a mark of affectionate familiarity which honored a servant. No other person was allowed to take liberties with her: to every one but her mistress she was known as Mrs. Ellmother.

"How is my aunt?" Emily asked.

"Bad."

"Why have I not heard of her illness before?"

"Because she's too fond of you to let you be distressed about her. Don't tell Emily; those were her orders as long as she kept her senses."

"Kept her senses! Good heavens! what do you mean?"

"Fever; that's what I mean."

"I must see her directly; I am not afraid of infection."

"There's no infection to be afraid of. But you mustn't see her, for all that."

"I insist on seeing her."

"Miss Emily, I am disappointing you for your own good. Don't you know me well enough to trust me by this time?"

"I do trust you."

"Then leave my mistress to me, and go and make yourself comfortable in your own room."

Emily's answer was a positive refusal. Mrs. Ellmother, driven to her last resource, raised a new obstacle.

"It's not to be done, I tell you. How can you see Miss Letitia when she can't bear the light in her room? Do you know what color her eyes are? Red, poor soul—red as a boiled lobster."

With every word the woman uttered, Emily's perplexity and distress increased. "You told me my aunt's illness was fever," she said, "and now you speak of some complaint in her eyes. Stand out of the way, if you please, and let me go to her."

Mrs. Ellmother, impenetrably superintending the removal of the luggage and the dismissal of the cab, looked out at the door. "Here's the doctor," she announced. "It seems I can't satisfy you; ask him what's the matter. Come in, doctor." She threw open the door of the parlor, and introduced Emily. "This is the mistress's niece, sir. Please try if you can keep her quiet. I can't." She placed chairs with the hospitable politeness of a servant of the old school, and returned to her post at Miss Letitia's bedside.

Dr. Allday was an elderly man, with a cool manner and a ruddy complexion—thoroughly acclimatized to the atmosphere of pain and grief in which it was his destiny to live. He spoke to Emily (without any undue familiarity) as if he had been accustomed to see her for the greater part of her life.

"That's a curious woman," he said, when Mrs. Ellmother closed the door; "the most headstrong person, I think, I ever met with. But devoted to her mistress, and, making allowance for her awkwardness, not a bad nurse. I am afraid I can't give you an encouraging report of your aunt. The rheumatic fever (aggravated by the situation of this house—built on clay, you know, and close to stagnant water) has been latterly complicated by delirium."

"Is that a bad sign, sir?"

"The worst possible sign; it shows that the disease has affected the heart. Yes; she is suffering from inflammation of the eyes, but that is an unimportant symptom. We can keep the pain under by means of cooling lotions and a dark room. I've often heard her speak of you—especially since the illness assumed a serious character. What did you say? Will she know you when you go into her room? This is about the time when the delirium usually sets in. I'll see if there's a quiet interval."

He opened the door—and came back again.

"By-the-way," he resumed, "I ought, perhaps, to explain how it was that I took the liberty of sending you that telegram. Mrs. Ellmother refused to inform you of her mistress's serious illness. That circumstance, according to my view of it, laid the responsibility on the doctor's shoulders. The

form taken by your aunt's delirium—I mean the apparent tendency of the words that escape her in that state—seems to excite some incomprehensible feeling in the mind of her crabbed servant. She wouldn't even let me go into the bedroom if she could possibly help it. Did Mrs. Ellmother give you a warm welcome when you came here?"

"Far from it. My arrival seemed to annoy her."

"Ah! just what I expected. These faithful old servants always end by presuming on their fidelity. Did you ever hear what a witty poet—I forget his name: he lived to be ninety—said of the man who had been his valet for more than half a century? 'For thirty years he was the best of servants; and for thirty years he has been the hardest of masters.' Quite true—I might say the same of my housekeeper. Rather a good story, isn't it?"

The story was completely thrown away on Emily: but one subject interested her now. "My poor aunt has always been fond of me," she said, "Perhaps she might know me when she recognizes nobody else."

"Not very likely," the doctor answered. "But there's no laying down any rule in cases of this kind. I have sometimes observed that circumstances which have produced a strong impression on patients when they are in a state of health give a certain direction to the wandering of their minds when they are in a state of fever. You will say, 'I am not a circumstance; I don't see how this encourages me to hope'—and you will be quite right. Instead of talking of my medical experience, I shall do better to look at Miss Letitia, and let you know the result. You have got other relations, I suppose? No? Very distressing—very distressing."

Who has not suffered as Emily suffered when she was left alone? Are there not moments—if we dare to confess the truth—when poor humanity loses its hold on the consolations of religion and the hope of immortality, and feels the cruelty of creation that bids us live, on the condition that we die, and leads the first warm beginnings of love, with merciless certainty, to the cold conclusion of the grave?

"She's quiet, for the time being," Dr. Allday announced, on his return.

"Remember, please, that she can't see you in the inflamed state of her eyes, and don't disturb the bed-curtains. The sooner you go to her the better, perhaps—if you have anything to say which depends on her recognizing your voice. I'll call to-morrow morning. Very distressing," he repeated, taking his hat and making his bow—"very distressing."

Emily crossed the narrow little passage which separated the two rooms, and opened the bedchamber door. Mrs. Ellmother met her on the threshold. "No," said the obstinate old servant, "you can't come in."

The faint voice of Miss Letitia made itself heard, calling Mrs. Ellmother by her familiar nickname.

"Bony, who is it?"

"Never mind."

"Who is it?"

"Miss Emily—if you must know."

"Oh! poor dear, why does she come here? Who told her I was ill?"

"The doctor told her."

"Don't come in, Emily. It will only distress you, and it will do me no good. God bless you, my love! Don't come in."

"There!" said Mrs. Ellmother. "Do you hear that? Go back to the sitting-room."

Thus far, the hard necessity of controlling herself had kept Emily silent. She was now able to speak without tears. "Remember the old times, aunt," she pleaded, gently. "Don't keep me out of your room, when I have come here to nurse you!"

"I'm her nurse. Go back to the sitting-room," Mrs. Ellmother repeated.

True love lasts while life lasts. The dying woman relented.

"Bony! Bony! I can't be unkind to Emily. Let her in."

Mrs. Ellmother still insisted on having her way. "You're contradicting your own orders," she said to her mistress. "You don't know how soon you may begin wandering in your mind again. Think, Miss Letitia—think."

This remonstrance produced no impression; it was received in silence. Mrs. Ellmother's great gaunt figure still blocked up the doorway.

"If you force me to it," Emily said, quietly, "I must go to the doctor and ask him to interfere."

"Do you mean that?" Mrs. Ellmother said, quietly, on her side.

"I do mean it," was the answer.

The old servant suddenly submitted, with a look which took Emily by surprise. She had expected to see anger: the face that now confronted her was a face subdued by sorrow and fear.

"I wash my hands of it," Mrs. Ellmother said. "Go in—and take the consequences."

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS LETITIA.

EMILY entered the room. The door was immediately closed on her from the outer side. Mrs. Ellmother's heavy steps were heard retreating along the passage. Then the banging of the door that led into the kitchen shook the flimsily built cottage. Then there was silence.

The dim light of a lamp, hidden away in a corner, and screened by a dingy green shade, just revealed the loosely curtained bed, and the table near it bearing medicine bottles and glasses. The only objects on the chimney-piece were a clock that had been stopped in mercy to the sufferer's irritable nerves, and an open case containing a machine for pouring drops into the eyes. The smell of fumigating pastilles hung heavily on the air. To Emily's excited imagination the silence was like the silence of death. She approached the bed trembling. "Won't you speak to me, aunt?"

"Is that you, Emily? Who let you come in?"

"You said I might come in, dear. Are you thirsty? I see some lemonade on the table. Shall I give it to you?"

"No. If you open the bed-curtains, you let in the light. My poor eyes! Why are you here, my dear? Why are you not at the school?"

"It's holiday-time, aunt. Besides, I have left school for good."

"Left school? My niece has left school?" Miss Letitia's memory made an effort as she repeated those words. "Yes, yes; you asked to go to school when your father died. You always had a governess in your father's time. Did you dislike the governess?"

"No, dear. I only asked to go to school because I hoped the change

would help me to bear our dreadful loss. It did help me. I made a kind friend at school—Cecilia Wyvil. Don't you remember Cecilia?"

She did remember. The name made its faint impression on her mind.

"You were going somewhere when you left school," she said, "and Cecilia had something to do with it. Oh, my love, how cruel of you to go away to a stranger, when you might live here with me!" She paused; her sense of what she had herself just said began to grow confused. "What stranger?" she asked, abruptly. "Was it a man? What name? The name's gone—lost. Oh, my mind! Has death got hold of my mind before my body?"

"Hush! hush! I'll tell you the name, aunt. Sir Jervis Redwood."

"I don't know him. I don't want to know him. Do you think he means to send for you? Perhaps he *has* sent for you. I won't allow it. You sha'n't go."

"Don't excite yourself, dear. I have refused to go; I mean to stay here with you."

The fevered brain held to its last idea. "*Has* he sent for you?" she said again, louder than before.

Emily replied once more, in terms carefully chosen with the one purpose of pacifying her. The attempt proved to be useless, and worse—it seemed to make her suspicious. "I won't be deceived!" she said; "I mean to know all about it. He did send for you. Whom did he send?"

"His housekeeper."

"What name?" The tone in which she put the question told of excitement that was rising to its climax. "Don't you know that I'm curious about names?" she burst out. "Why do you provoke me? Who is it?"

"Nobody you know, or need care about, dear aunt. Mrs. Rook."

Instantly on the utterance of that name there followed an unexpected result. Silence ensued.

Emily waited—hesitated—advanced to part the curtains and look in at her aunt. She was stopped by a dreadful sound of laughter—the cheerless laughter that is heard among the mad. It suddenly ended in a dreary sigh.

Afraid to look in, she spoke, hardly knowing what she said. "Is there anything you wish for? Shall I call—"

Miss Letitia's voice interrupted her. Dull, low, rapidly muttering, it was unlike, shockingly unlike, the familiar voice of her aunt. It said strange words.

"Mrs. Rook? What does Mrs. Rook matter? Or her husband either? Bony, Bony, you're frightened about nothing. Where's the danger of those two people turning up? Do you know how many miles away the village is? Oh, you fool—a hundred miles and more. Never mind the coroner: the coroner must keep in his own district, and the jury too. A risky deception? I call it a pious fraud. And I have a tender conscience and a cultivated mind. The newspapers? What do I care if she does see the newspapers! She mightn't read it—and, if she did read it, she wouldn't have a suspicion of the truth. You poor old Bony! Upon my word you do me good—you make me laugh."

The cheerless laughter broke out again, and died away again drearily in a sigh.

Accustomed to decide rapidly in the ordinary emergencies of her life,

Emily felt herself painfully embarrassed by the position in which she was now placed.

After what she had already heard, could she reconcile it to her sense of duty to her aunt to remain any longer in the room?

In the helpless self-betrayal of delirium Miss Letitia had revealed some act of concealment committed in her past life, and confided to her faithful old servant. Under these circumstances, had Emily made any discoveries which convicted her of taking a base advantage of her position at the bedside? Most assuredly not! The nature of the act of concealment; the causes that had led to it; the person (or persons) affected by it—these were mysteries which left her entirely in the dark. She had found out that her aunt was acquainted with Mrs. Rook, and that was literally all she knew.

Blameless, so far, in the line of conduct that she had pursued, might she still remain in the bed-chamber—on this distinct understanding with herself: that she would instantly return to the sitting-room if she heard anything which could suggest a doubt of Miss Letitia's claim to her affection and respect? After some hesitation as to the means of arriving at the right answer to this question, she consulted her conscience. Does conscience ever say No when inclination says Yes? Emily's conscience sided with her reluctance to leave her aunt.

Throughout the time occupied by these reflections the silence had remained unbroken. Emily began to feel uneasy. She timidly put her hand through the curtains and took Miss Letitia's hand. The contact with the burning skin startled her. She turned away to the door to call to the servant, when the sound of her aunt's voice hurried her back to the bed.

"Are you there, Bony?" the voice asked.

Was her mind getting clear again? Emily tried the experiment of making a plain reply. "Your niece is with you," she said. "Shall I call the servant?"

Miss Letitia's mind was still far away from Emily, and from the present time.

"The servant?" she repeated. "All the servants but you, Bony, have been sent away. London's the place for us. No gossiping servants and no curious neighbors in London. Bury the horrid truth in London. Ah, you may well say I look anxious and wretched. I hate deception—and yet it must be done. Why don't you help me? Why don't you find out where that vile woman lives? Only let me get at her, and I'll make Sara ashamed of herself."

Emily's heart beat fast when she heard the woman's name. "Sara" (as she and her school-fellows knew) was the baptismal name of Miss Jethro. Had her aunt alluded to the disgraced teacher, or to some other woman?

She waited eagerly to hear more. There was nothing to be heard. At this most interesting moment the silence remained undisturbed.

In the fervor of her anxiety to set her doubts at rest, Emily's faith in her good resolutions began to waver. The temptation to say something which might set her aunt talking again was too strong to be resisted—if she remained at the bedside. Despairing of herself, she rose and turned to the door. In the moment that passed while she crossed the room, the very words occurred to her that would suit her purpose. Her cheeks were hot

with shame—she hesitated—she looked back at the bed. The words passed her lips.

"Sara is only one of the woman's names," she said. "Do you like her other name?"

The rapidly muttering tones broke out instantly, but not in answer to Emily. The sound of a voice had encouraged Miss Letitia to pursue her own confused train of thought, and had stimulated the fast-failing capacity of speech to exert itself once more.

"No! no! He's too cunning for you, and too cunning for me. He doesn't leave letters about; he destroys them all. Did I say he was too cunning for us? It's false. We are too cunning for him. Who found the morsels of his letter in the basket? Who stuck them together? Ah, *we* know! Don't read it, Bony. 'Dear Miss Jethro'—don't read it again. 'Miss Jethro' in his letter, and 'Sara' when he talks to himself in the garden. Oh, who would have believed it of him if we hadn't seen it and heard it ourselves!"

There was no more doubt now.

But who was the man so bitterly and so regretfully alluded to?

No; this time Emily held firmly by the resolution which bound her to respect the helpless position of her aunt. The speediest way of summoning Mrs. Ellmother would be to ring the bell. As she touched the handle a faint cry of suffering from the bed called her back.

"Oh, so thirsty!" murmured the failing voice—"so thirsty!"

She parted the curtains. The shrouded lamp-light just showed her the green shade over Miss Letitia's eyes; the hollow cheeks below it; the arms laid helplessly on the bedclothes. "Oh, aunt, don't you know my voice? Don't you know Emily? Let me kiss you, dear." Useless to plead with her; useless to kiss her; she only reiterated the words, "So thirsty! so thirsty!" Emily raised the poor tortured body with a patient caution which spared it pain, and put the glass to her aunt's lips. She drank the lemonade to the last drop. Refreshed for the moment, she spoke again—spoke to the visionary servant of her delirious fancy, while she rested in Emily's arms.

"For God's sake, take care how you answer if she questions you! If *she* knew what *we* know! Are men ever ashamed? Ha, the vile woman! the vile woman!"

Her voice, sinking gradually, dropped to a whisper. The next few words that escaped her were muttered inarticulately. Little by little the false energy of fever was wearing itself out. She lay silent and still. To look at her now was to look at the image of death. Once more Emily kissed her, closed the curtains, and rang the bell.

Mrs. Ellmother failed to appear. Emily left the room to call to her.

Arrived at the top of the kitchen stairs, she noticed a slight change. The door below, which she had heard banged on first entering her aunt's room, now stood open. She called to Mrs. Ellmother.

A strange voice answered her. Its accent was soft and courteous, presenting the strongest imaginable contrast to the harsh tones of Miss Letitia's crabbed old maid.

"Is there anything I can do for you, miss?"

The person making this polite inquiry appeared at the foot of the stairs

—a plump and comely woman of middle age. She looked up at the young lady with a pleasant smile.

"I beg your pardon," Emily said; "I had no intention of disturbing you. I called to Mrs. Ellmother."

The stranger advanced a little way up the stairs, and answered, "Mrs. Ellmother is not here."

"Do you expect her back soon?"

"Excuse me, miss—I don't expect her back at all."

"Do you mean to say that she has left the house?"

"Yes, miss. She has left the house."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. MOSEY.

EMILY's first act—after the discovery of Mrs. Ellmother's incomprehensible disappearance—was to invite the new servant to follow her into the sitting-room.

"Can you explain this?" she began.

"No, miss."

"May I ask if you have come here by Mrs. Ellmother's invitation?"

"By Mrs. Ellmother's *request*, miss."

"Can you tell me how she came to make the request?"

"With pleasure, miss. Perhaps—as you find me here, a stranger to yourself, in place of the customary servant—I ought to begin by giving you a reference?"

"And, perhaps (if you will be so kind), by mentioning your name," Emily added.

"Thank you for reminding me, miss. My name is Elizabeth Mosey. I am well known to the gentleman who attends Miss Letitia: Dr. Allday will speak to my character, and also to my experience as a nurse. If it would be in any way satisfactory to give you a second reference—"

"Quite needless, Mrs. Mosey."

"Permit me to thank you again, miss. I was at home this evening, when Mrs. Ellmother called at my lodgings. Says she, 'I have come here, Elizabeth, to ask a favor of you for old friendship's sake.' Says I, 'My dear, pray command me, whatever it may be.' If this seems rather a hasty answer to make, before I knew what the favor was, might I ask you to bear in mind that Mrs. Ellmother put it to me 'for old friendship's sake'—alluding to my late husband, and to the business which we carried on at that time. Through no fault of ours, we got into difficulties. Persons whom we had trusted proved unworthy. Not to trouble you further, I may say at once we should have been ruined if our old friend Mrs. Ellmother had not come forward and trusted us with the savings of her lifetime. The money was all paid back again before my husband's death. But I don't consider—and I think you won't consider—that the obligation was paid back too. Prudent or not prudent, there is nothing Mrs. Ellmother can ask of me that I am not willing to do. If I have put myself in an awkward situation (and I don't deny that it looks so), this is the only excuse, miss, that I can make for my conduct."

Mrs. Mosey was too fluent, and too fond of hearing the sound of her own eminently persuasive voice. Making allowance for these little drawbacks, the impression that she produced was decidedly favorable, and however rashly she might have acted, her motive was beyond reproach. Having said some kind words to this effect, Emily led her back to the main interest of her narrative.

"Did Mrs. Ellmother give no reason for leaving my aunt at such a time as this?" she asked.

"The very words I said to her, miss."

"And what did she say by way of reply?"

"She burst out crying—a thing I have never known her to do before, in an experience of twenty years."

"And she really asked you to take her place here at a moment's notice?"

"That was just what she did," Mrs. Mosey answered. "I had no need to tell her I was astonished; my looks spoke for me, no doubt. She's a hard woman in speech and manner, I admit. But there's more feeling in her than you would suppose. 'If you are the good friend I take you for,' she says, 'don't ask me for reasons; I am doing what is forced on me, and doing it with a heavy heart.' In my place, miss, would you have insisted on her explaining herself after that? The one thing I naturally wanted to know was, if I could speak to some lady in the position of mistress here before I ventured to intrude. Mrs. Ellmother understood that it was her duty to help me in this particular. Your poor aunt being out of the question, she mentioned you."

"How did she speak of me? In an angry way?"

"No, indeed; quite the contrary. She says: 'You will find Miss Emily at the cottage. She is Miss Letitia's niece. Everybody likes her—and everybody is right.'"

"She really said that?"

"Those were her words. And, what is more, she gave me a message for you at parting. 'If Miss Emily was surprised' (that is how she put it), 'give her my duty and good wishes, and tell her to remember what I said when she took my place at her aunt's bedside.' I don't presume to inquire what this means," said Mrs. Mosey, respectfully ready to hear what it meant, if Emily would only be so good as to tell her. "I deliver the message, miss, as it was delivered to me. After which Mrs. Ellmother went her way, and I went mine."

"Do you know where she went?"

"No, miss."

"Have you nothing more to tell me?"

"Nothing more, except that she gave me my directions, of course, about the nursing. I took them down in writing, and you will find them in their proper place, with the prescriptions and the medicines."

Acting at once on this hint, Emily led the way to her aunt's room.

Miss Letitia was silent when the new nurse softly parted the curtains, looked in, and drew them together again. Consulting her watch, Mrs. Mosey compared her written directions with the medicine bottles on the table, and set one apart to be used at the appointed time. "Nothing, so far, to alarm us," she whispered. "You look sadly pale and tired, miss. Might I advise you to rest a little?"

"If there is any change, Mrs. Mosey—either for the better or the worse—of course you will let me know."

"Certainly, miss."

Emily returned to the sitting-room; not to rest (after all that she had heard), but to think.

Amid much that was unintelligible, certain plain conclusions presented themselves to her mind.

After what the doctor had already said to Emily on the subject of delirium generally, Mrs. Ellmother's proceedings became intelligible: they proved that she knew by experience the perilous course taken by her mistress's wandering thoughts when they expressed themselves in words. This explained the concealment of Miss Letitia's illness from her niece, as well as the reiterated efforts of the old servant to prevent Emily from entering the bedroom.

But the event which had just happened—that is to say, Mrs. Ellmother's sudden departure from the cottage—was not only of serious importance in itself, but pointed to a startling conclusion.

The faithful maid had left the mistress whom she had loved and served sinking under a fatal illness, and had put another woman in her place, careless of what that woman might discover by listening at the bedside, rather than confront Emily after she had been within hearing of her aunt while the brain of the suffering woman was deranged by fever. There was the state of the case in plain words.

In what frame of mind had Mrs. Ellmother adopted this desperate course of action?

To use her own expression, she had deserted Miss Letitia "with a heavy heart." To judge by her own language addressed to Mrs. Mosey, she had left Emily to the mercy of a stranger—animated, nevertheless, by sincere feelings of attachment and respect. That her fears had taken for granted suspicion which Emily had not felt, and discoveries which Emily had (as yet) not made, in no way modified the serious nature of the inference which her conduct justified. The disclosure which this woman dreaded—who could doubt it now?—directly threatened Emily's peace of mind. There was no disguising it: the innocent niece was associated with an act of deception, which had been until that day the undetected secret of the aunt and the aunt's maid.

In this conclusion, and in this only, was to be found the rational explanation of Mrs. Ellmother's choice—placed between the alternatives of submitting to discovery by Emily or of leaving the house.

Poor Miss Letitia's writing-table stood near the window of the sitting-room. Shrinking from the further pursuit of thoughts which might end in disposing her mind to distrust of her dying aunt, Emily looked round in search of some employment sufficiently interesting to absorb her attention. The writing-table reminded her that she owed a letter to Cecilia. That helpful friend had surely the first claim to know why she had failed to keep her engagement with Sir Jervis Redwood.

After mentioning the telegram which had followed Mrs. Rook's arrival at the school, Emily's letter proceeded in these terms:

"As soon as I had in some degree recovered myself, I informed Mrs. Rook of my aunt's serious illness.

"Although she carefully confined herself to commonplace expressions of sympathy, I could see that it was equally a relief to both of us to feel that we were prevented from being travelling companions. Don't suppose that I have taken a capricious dislike to Mrs. Rook, or that you are in any way to blame for the unfavorable impression which she has produced on me. I will make this plain when we meet. In the mean while, I need only tell you that I gave her a letter of explanation to present to Sir Jervis Redwood. I also informed him of my address in London, adding a request that he would forward your letter, in case you have written to me before you receive these lines.

"Kind Mr. Alban Morris accompanied me to the railway station, and arranged with the guard to take special care of me on the journey to London. We used to think him rather a heartless man. We were quite wrong. I don't know what his plans are for spending the summer holidays. Go where he may, I remember his kindness; my best wishes go with him.

"My dear, I must not sadden your enjoyment of your pleasant visit to the Engadine by writing at any length of the sorrow that I am suffering. You know how I love my aunt, and how gratefully I have always felt her motherly goodness to me. The doctor does not conceal the truth. At her age there is no hope: my father's last-left relation, my one dearest friend, is dying.

"No! I must not forget that I have another friend—I must find some comfort in thinking of *you*.

"I do so long in my solitude for a letter from my dear Cecilia! Nobody comes to see me when I most want sympathy; I am a stranger in this vast city. The members of my mother's family are settled in Australia: they have not even written to me in all the long years that have passed since her death. You remember how cheerfully I used to look forward to my new life on leaving school? Good-by, my darling. While I can see your sweet face in my thoughts I don't despair—dark as it looks now—of the future that is before me."

Emily had closed and addressed her letter, and was just rising from her chair, when she heard the voice of the new nurse at the door.

CHAPTER XV.

EMILY.

"MAY I say a word?" Mrs. Mosey inquired. She entered the room, pale and trembling. Seeing the change, Emily dropped into her chair.

"Dead?" she said, faintly.

Mrs. Mosey looked at her in vacant surprise.

"I wish to say, miss, that your aunt has frightened me."

Even that allusion was enough for Emily.

"You need say no more," she replied; "I know but too well how my aunt's mind is affected by the fever."

Confused and frightened as she was, Mrs. Mosey still found relief in her customary flow of words.

"Many and many a person have I nursed in fever," she announced. "Many and many a person have I heard say strange things. Never yet, miss, in all my experience—"

"Don't tell me of it!" Emily interposed.

"Oh, but I *must* tell you! In your own interests, Miss Emily—in your own interests. I won't be inhuman enough to leave you alone in the house to-night; but if this delirium goes on, I must ask you to get another nurse. Shocking suspicions are lying in wait for me in that bedroom, as it were. I can't resist them as I ought, if I go back again, and hear your aunt saying what she has been saying for the last half-hour and more. Mrs. Ellmother has expected impossibilities of me, and Mrs. Ellmother must take the consequences. I don't say she didn't warn me—speaking, you will please to understand, in the strictest confidence. 'Elizabeth,' she says, 'you know how wildly people talk in Miss Letitia's present condition. Pay no heed to it,' she says. 'Let it go in at one ear and out at the other,' she said. 'If Miss Emily asks questions, you know nothing about it. If she's frightened you know nothing about it. If she bursts into fits of crying that are dreadful to see, pity her, poor thing, but take no notice.' All very well, and sounds like speaking out, doesn't it? Nothing of the sort! Mrs. Ellmother warns me to expect this, that, and the other. But there is one horrid thing (which I heard, mind, over and over again at your aunt's bedside) that she does *not* prepare me for, and that horrid thing is—murder!"

At that last word Mrs. Mosey dropped her voice to a whisper, and waited to see what effect she had produced.

Sorely tried already by the cruel perplexities of her position, Emily's courage failed to resist the first sensation of horror aroused in her by the climax of the nurse's hysterical narrative. Encouraged by her silence, Mrs. Mosey went on. She lifted one hand with theatrical solemnity, and luxuriously terrified herself with her own horrors.

"An inn, Miss Emily, a lonely inn somewhere in the country, and a comfortable room at the inn, with a make-shift bed at one end of it, and a make-shift bed at the other—I give you my word of honor, that was how your aunt put it. She spoke of two men next—two men asleep (you understand) in the two beds. I think she called them 'gentlemen,' but I can't be sure, and I wouldn't deceive you—you know I wouldn't deceive you for the world. Miss Letitia muttered and mumbled, poor soul. I own I was getting tired of listening, when she burst out plain again, in that one horrid word—oh, miss, don't be impatient! don't interrupt me!"

Emily did interrupt, nevertheless. In some degree at least she had recovered herself. "No more of it," she said—"I won't hear a word more."

But Mrs. Mosey was too resolutely bent on asserting her own importance by making the most of the alarm that she had suffered to be repressed by any ordinary method of remonstrance. Without paying the slightest attention to what Emily had said, she went on again, more loudly and more excitably than ever:

"Listen, miss—listen! The dreadful part of it is to come; you haven't heard about the two gentlemen yet. One of them was murdered—what do you think of that?—and the other (I heard your aunt say it, in so many words) committed the crime. Did Miss Letitia fancy she was addressing

a lot of people when *you* were nursing her? She called out like a person making public proclamation when *I* was in her room. 'Whoever you are, good people' (she says), 'a hundred pounds reward if you find the runaway murderer. Search everywhere for a poor, weak, womanish creature, with rings on his little white hands. There's nothing about him like a man, except his voice—a fine round voice. You'll know him, my friends—the wretch, the monster—you'll know him by his voice.' That was how she put it—I tell you again, that was how she put it. Did you hear her scream? Ah, my dear young lady, so much the better for you! 'Oh, the horrid murder!' she says; 'hush it up.' I'll take my Bible oath before the magistrate," cried Mrs. Mosey, starting out of her chair, "your aunt said, 'Hush it up.'"

Emily crossed the room. The energy of her character was roused at last. She seized the foolish woman by the shoulders, forced her back in the chair, and looked her straight in the face, without uttering a word.

For the moment Mrs. Mosey was petrified. She had fully expected—having reached the end of her terrible story—to find Emily at her feet, entreating her not to carry out her intention of leaving the cottage the next morning; and she had determined, after her sense of her own importance had been sufficiently flattered, to grant the prayer of the helpless young lady. Those were her anticipations—and how had they been fulfilled? She had been treated like a mad woman in a state of revolt.

"How dare you assault me?" she asked, piteously. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. God knows I meant well."

"You are not the first person," Emily answered, quietly releasing her, "who has done wrong with the best intentions."

"I did my duty, miss, when I told you what your aunt said."

"You forgot your duty when you listened to what my aunt said."

"Allow me to explain myself."

"No: not a word more on *that* subject shall pass between us. Remain in the room, if you please; I have something else to say."

"After the manner in which you have treated me, I don't consider myself bound to obey your orders."

"I have no orders to give you; I have something to suggest in your own interests. Wait, and compose yourself."

The purpose which had taken a foremost place in Emily's mind rested on the firm foundation of her love and pity for her aunt.

Now that she had regained the power to think, she felt a hateful doubt pressed on her by Mrs. Mosey's disclosures. Having taken for granted that there was a foundation in truth for what she herself had heard in her aunt's room, could she reasonably resist the conclusion that there must be a foundation in truth for what Mrs. Mosey had heard under similar circumstances?

There was but one way of escaping from this dilemma—and Emily deliberately took it. She turned her back on her own convictions, and persuaded herself that she had been in the wrong when she had attached importance to anything that her aunt had said under the influence of fever. A man would have seen fatal obstacles to the attainment of this comforting point of view; a man would have remembered that Miss Letitia's wanderings had included the names of two existing persons, Mrs.

Rook and Miss Jethro. The woman, without stopping to reason or remember, accepted any conclusion which promised to secure her peace of mind. Freed from the oppression of her own misgivings, Emily resolved to face the prospect of a night's solitude by the death-bed rather than permit Mrs. Mosey to have a second opportunity of entering Miss Letitia's room.

"Do you mean to keep me waiting much longer, miss?"

"Not a moment longer, now you are composed again," Emily answered. "I have been thinking of what has happened; and it appears to me that we have both made mistakes, which a little reflection might have shown us how to avoid."

"In what particular, if you please?" Mrs. Mosey inquired, stiffly.

"You would have acted more wisely, as I think," Emily proceeded, "if you had excused yourself from granting Mrs. Ellmother's strange request, and had advised her to return to her duty. And I should have acted more wisely if I had considered the trying circumstances in which I am placed before I accepted the offer of your services."

"If that means, Miss Emily, that you are sorry I ever set foot in this house, I'm sure I'm sorry too."

"In that case, Mrs. Mosey, you will be all the readier to accept the suggestion which I wish to offer. I have no fear of remaining here by myself for the next few hours. Why should you put off your departure until the doctor comes to-morrow morning? There is really no objection to your leaving me to-night."

"I beg your pardon, miss; there is an objection. I have already told you I can't reconcile it to my conscience to leave you here by yourself. I am not an inhuman woman," said Mrs. Mosey, putting her handkerchief to her eyes—smitten with pity for herself.

Emily tried the effect of a conciliatory reply. "I am grateful for your kindness in offering to stay with me," she said.

"Very good of you, I'm sure," Mrs. Mosey answered, ironically. "But, for all that, you persist in sending me away."

"I persist in thinking that there is no necessity for my keeping you here until to-morrow."

"Oh, have it your own way! I am not reduced to forcing my company on anybody."

Mrs. Mosey put her handkerchief in her pocket and asserted her dignity. With head erect and slowly marching steps, she walked out of the room. Emily was left in the cottage alone with her dying aunt.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS JETHRO.

A FORTNIGHT after the disappearance of Mrs. Ellmother and the dismissal of Mrs. Mosey, Dr. Allday entered his consulting-room, punctual to the hour at which he was accustomed to receive patients.

An occasional wrinkling of his eyebrows, accompanied by an intermittent restlessness in his movements, appeared to indicate some disturbance of this worthy man's professional composure. His mind was, indeed, not

at ease. Even the unexcitable old doctor had felt the attraction which had already conquered three such dissimilar people as Alban Morris, Cecilia Wyvil, and Francine De Sor. He was thinking of Emily.

A ring at the door-bell announced the arrival of the first patient.

The servant introduced a tall lady, dressed simply and elegantly in dark apparel. Noticeable features, of a Jewish cast—worn and haggard, but still preserving their grandeur of form—were visible through her veil. She moved with grace and dignity, and she stated her object in consulting Dr. Allday with the ease of a well-bred woman.

"I come to ask your opinion, sir, on the state of my heart," she said; "and I am recommended by a patient who has consulted you with advantage to herself." She placed a card on the doctor's writing-desk, and added, "I have become acquainted with the lady by being one of the lodgers in her house."

The doctor recognized the name, and the usual proceedings ensued. After careful examination he arrived at a favorable conclusion. "I may tell you at once," he said; "there is no reason to be alarmed about the state of your heart."

"I have never felt any alarm about myself," she answered, quietly. "A sudden death is an easy death. If one's affairs are settled, it seems, on that account, to be the death to prefer. My object was to settle *my* affairs—such as they are—if you had considered my life to be in danger. Is there nothing the matter with me?"

"I don't say that," the doctor replied. "The action of your heart is very feeble. Take the medicine that I shall prescribe, pay a little more attention to eating and drinking than ladies usually do, don't run upstairs, and don't fatigue yourself by violent exercise, and I see no reason why you shouldn't live to be an old woman."

"God forbid!" the lady said to herself. She turned away, and looked out of the window with a bitter smile.

Dr. Allday wrote his prescription. "Are you likely to make a long stay in London?" he asked.

"I am here for a little while only. Do you wish to see me again?"

"I should like to see you once more before you go away, if you can make it convenient. What name shall I put on the prescription?"

"Miss Jethro."

"A remarkable name," the doctor said, in his matter-of-fact way.

Miss Jethro's bitter smile showed itself again. Without otherwise noticing what Dr. Allday had said, she laid the consultation fee on his table. At the same moment the footman appeared with a letter. "From Miss Emily Brown," he said. "No answer required."

He held the door open as he delivered the message, seeing that Miss Jethro was about to leave the room. She dismissed him by a gesture, and returning to the table, pointed to the letter.

"Was this lady lately a pupil at Miss Ladd's school?" she inquired.

"My correspondent has just left Miss Ladd," the doctor answered. "Are you a friend of hers?"

"I am acquainted with her."

"You would be doing the poor child a kindness if you would go and see her. She has no friends in London."

"Pardon me—she has an aunt."

"Her aunt died a week since."

"Are there no other relations?"

"None. A melancholy state of things, isn't it? She would have been absolutely alone in the house if I had not sent one of my women-servants to stay with her for the present. Did you know her father?"

Miss Jethro passed over the question as if she had not heard it. "Has the young lady dismissed her aunt's servants?" she asked.

"Her aunt kept but one servant, ma'am. The woman has spared Miss Emily the trouble of dismissing her." He briefly alluded to Mrs. Ellmother's desertion of her mistress. "I can't explain it," he said, when he had done. "Can you?"

"What makes you think, sir, that I can help you? I never even heard of the servant, and the mistress was a stranger to me."

At Dr. Allday's age a man is not easily discouraged by reproof, even when it is administered by a handsome woman. "I thought you might have known Miss Emily's father," he persisted.

Miss Jethro rose, and wished him good-morning. "I must not occupy any more of your valuable time," she said.

"Suppose you wait a minute?" the doctor suggested.

Impenetrable as ever, he rang the bell. "Any patients in the waiting-room?" he inquired. "You see I have time to spare," he resumed, when the man had replied in the negative. "I take an interest in this poor girl, and I thought—"

"If you think that I take an interest in her too," Miss Jethro interposed, "you are perfectly right. I knew her father," she added, abruptly, the allusion to Emily having apparently reminded her of the question which she had hitherto declined to notice.

"In that case," Dr. Allday proceeded, "I want a word of advice. Won't you sit down?"

She took a chair in silence. An irregular movement in the lower part of her veil seemed to indicate that she was breathing with difficulty. The doctor observed her with close attention. "Let me see my prescription again," he said. Having added an ingredient, he handed it back with a word of explanation. "Your nerves are more out of order than I supposed. The hardest disease to cure that I know of is—worry."

The hint could hardly have been plainer, but it was lost on Miss Jethro. Whatever her troubles might be, her medical adviser was not made acquainted with them. Quietly folding up the prescription, she reminded him that he had proposed to ask her advice.

"In what way can I be of service to you?" she inquired.

"I am afraid I must try your patience," the doctor acknowledged, "if I am to answer that question plainly."

With these prefatory words, he described the events that had followed Mrs. Mosey's appearance at the cottage. "I am only doing justice to this foolish woman," he continued, "when I tell you that she came here after she had left Miss Emily, and did her best to set matters right. I went to the poor girl directly, and I felt it my duty, after looking at her aunt, not to leave her alone for that night. When I got home the next morning, whom do you think I found waiting for me? Mrs. Ellmother!"

He stopped, in the expectation that Miss Jethro would express some surprise. Not a word passed her lips.

"Mrs. Ellmother's object was to ask how her mistress was going on," the doctor proceeded. "Every day, while Miss Letitia still lived, she came here to make the same inquiry, without a word of explanation. On the day of the funeral there she was at the church, dressed in deep mourning, and, as I can personally testify, crying bitterly. When the ceremony was over—can you believe it?—she slipped away before Miss Emily or I could speak to her. We have seen nothing more of her, and heard nothing more, from that time to this."

He stopped again. The silent lady still listened without making any remark.

"Have you no opinion to express?" the doctor asked, bluntly.

"I am waiting," Miss Jethro answered.

"Waiting—for what?"

"I haven't heard yet why you want my advice."

Dr. Allday's observation of humanity had hitherto reckoned want of caution among the deficient moral qualities in the natures of women. He set down Miss Jethro as a remarkable exception to a general rule.

"I want you to advise me as to the right course to take with Miss Emily," he said. "She has assured me she attaches no serious importance to her aunt's wanderings, when the poor old lady's fever was at its worst. I don't doubt that she speaks the truth; but I have my own reasons for being afraid that she is deceiving herself. Will you bear this in mind?"

"Yes, if it's necessary."

"In plain words, Miss Jethro, you think I am still wandering from the point. I have got to the point. Yesterday Miss Emily told me that she hoped to be soon composed enough to examine the papers left by her aunt."

Miss Jethro suddenly turned in her chair and looked at Dr. Allday.

"Are you beginning to feel interested?" the doctor asked, mischievously.

She neither acknowledged nor denied it. "Go on," was all she said.

"I don't know how *you* feel," he proceeded; "I am afraid of the discoveries which she may make, and I am strongly tempted to advise her to leave the proposed examination to her aunt's lawyer. Is there anything in your knowledge of Miss Emily's late father which tells you that I am right?"

"Before I reply," said Miss Jethro, "it may not be amiss to let the young lady speak for herself."

"How is she to do that?" the doctor asked.

Miss Jethro pointed to the writing-table. "Look there," she said; "you have not yet opened Miss Emily's letter."

CHAPTER XVII.

DR. ALLDAY.

ABSORBED in the effort to overcome his patient's reserve, the doctor had forgotten Emily's letter. He opened it immediately.

After reading the first sentence he looked up with an expression of annoyance. "She has begun the examination of the papers already," he said.

"Then I can be of no further use to you," Miss Jethro rejoined. She made a second attempt to leave the room.

Dr. Allday turned to the next page of the letter. "Stop!" he cried. "She has found something—and here it is."

He held up a small printed handbill, which had been placed between the first and second pages. "Suppose you look at it?" he said.

"Whether I am interested in it or not?" Miss Jethro asked.

"You may be interested in what Miss Emily says about it in her letter."

"Do you propose to show me her letter?"

"I propose to read it to you."

Miss Jethro took the handbill without further objection. It was expressed in these words:

"MURDER. £100 REWARD. Whereas a murder was committed on the thirtieth September, 1877, at the Hand-in-hand Inn, in the village of Zeeland, Hampshire, the above reward will be paid to any person or persons whose exertions shall lead to the arrest and conviction of the suspected murderer. Name not known. Supposed age, between twenty and thirty years. A well-made man, of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers. Small, white, well-shaped hands. Wears valuable rings on the last two fingers of the left hand. Dressed neatly in a dark gray tourist's suit. Carried a knapsack, as if on a pedestrian excursion. Remarkably good voice, smooth, full, and persuasive. Ingratiating manners. Apply to the Chief Inspector, Metropolitan Police Office, London."

Miss Jethro laid aside the handbill without any visible appearance of agitation. The doctor took up Emily's letter, and read as follows:

"You will be as much relieved as I was, my kind friend, when you look at the paper inclosed. I found it loose in a blank book, with cuttings from newspapers, and odd announcements of lost property, and other curious things (all huddled together between the leaves), which my aunt no doubt intended to set in order and fix in their proper places. She must have been thinking of her book, poor soul, in her last illness. Here is the origin of those "terrible words" which frightened stupid Mrs. Mosey. Is it not encouraging to have discovered such a confirmation of my opinion as this? I feel a new interest in looking over the papers that still remain to be examined—"

Before he could get to the end of the sentence, Miss Jethro's agitation broke through her reserve.

"Do what you proposed to do," she burst out, vehemently. "Stop her

at once from carrying her examination any further. If she hesitates, insist on it."

At last Dr. Allday had triumphed. "It has been a long time coming," he remarked, in his cool way, "and it's all the more welcome on that account. You dread the discoveries she may make, Miss Jethro, as I do. And *you* know what those discoveries may be."

"What I do know or don't know is of no importance," she answered, sharply.

"Excuse me, it is of very serious importance. I have no authority over this poor girl; I am not even an old friend. You tell me to insist. Help me to declare honestly that I know of circumstances which justify me, and I may insist to some purpose."

Miss Jethro lifted her veil for the first time, and eyed him searchingly.

"I believe I can trust you," she said. "Now listen. The one consideration on which I consent to open my lips is consideration for Miss Emily's tranquillity. Promise me absolute secrecy, on your word of honor."

He gave the promise.

"I want to know one thing, first," Miss Jethro proceeded. "Did she tell you—as she once told me—that her father had died of heart-complaint?"

"Yes."

"Did you put any questions to her?"

"I asked how long ago it was."

"And she told you?"

"She told me."

"You wish to know, Dr. Allday, what discoveries Miss Emily may yet make among her aunt's papers. Judge for yourself when I tell you that she has been deceived about her father's death."

"Do you mean that he is still living?"

"I mean that she has been deceived—purposely deceived—about the manner of his death."

"Who was the wretch who did it?"

"You are wronging the dead, sir. The truth can only have been concealed out of the purest motives of love and pity. I don't desire to disguise the conclusion at which I have arrived, after what I have heard from yourself. The person responsible must be Miss Emily's aunt, and the old servant must have been in her confidence. Remember, you are bound in honor not to repeat to any living creature what I have just said."

The doctor followed Miss Jethro to the door. "You have not yet told me," he said, "*how* her father died."

"I have no more to tell you."

With those words she left him.

He rang for his servant. To wait until the hour at which he was accustomed to go out might be to leave Emily's peace of mind at the mercy of an accident. "I am going to the cottage," he said. "If anybody wants me, I shall be back in a quarter of an hour."

On the point of leaving the house, he remembered that Emily would probably expect him to return the handbill. As he took it up, the first lines caught his eye: he read the date at which the murder had been committed, for the second time. On a sudden the ruddy color left his face.

"Good God!" he cried, "her father was murdered, and that woman was concerned in it."

Following the impulse that urged him, he secured the handbill in his pocket-book, snatched up the card which his patient had presented as her introduction, and instantly left the house. He called the first cab that passed him, and drove to Miss Jethro's lodgings.

"Gone," was the servant's answer when he inquired for her.

He insisted on speaking to the landlady. "Hardly ten minutes have passed," he said, "since she left my house."

"Hardly ten minutes have passed," the landlady replied, "since that message was brought here by a boy."

The message had been evidently written in great haste: "I am unexpectedly obliged to leave London. A bank-note is inclosed in payment of my debt to you. I will send for my luggage."

The doctor withdrew.

"Unexpectedly obliged to leave London," he repeated, as he got into the cab again. "Her flight condemns her; not a doubt of it now.—As fast as you can," he shouted to the man, directing him to drive to Emily's cottage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS LADD.

ARRIVING at the cottage, Dr. Allday discovered a gentleman who was just closing the garden gate behind him.

"Has Miss Emily had a visitor?" he inquired when the servant admitted him.

"The gentleman left a letter for Miss Emily, sir."

"Did he ask to see her?"

"He asked after Miss Letitia's health. When he heard that she was dead, he seemed to be startled, and went away directly."

"Did he give his name?"

"No, sir."

The doctor found Emily absorbed over her letter. His anxiety to forestall any possible discovery of the deception which had concealed the terrible story of her father's death kept Dr. Allday's vigilance on the watch. He doubted the gentleman who had abstained from giving his name; he even distrusted the other unknown person who had written to Emily.

She looked up. Her face relieved him of his misgivings before she could speak.

"At last I have heard from my dearest friend," she said. "You remember what I told you about Cecilia? Here is a letter—a long, delightful letter—from the Engadine, left at the door by some gentleman unknown. I was questioning the servant when you rang the bell."

"You may question me if you prefer it. I arrived just as the gentleman was shutting your garden gate."

"Oh, tell me! what was he like?"

"Tall, and thin, and dark. Wore a vile republican-looking felt hat. Had nasty, ill-tempered wrinkles between his eyebrows. The sort of man I distrust by instinct."

"Why?"

"Because he doesn't shave."

"Do you mean that he wore a beard?"

"Yes; a curly black beard."

Emily clasped her hands in amazement. "Can it be Alban Morris?" she exclaimed.

The doctor looked at her with a sardonic smile; he thought it likely that he had discovered her sweetheart.

"Who is Mr. Alban Morris?" he asked.

"The drawing master at Miss Ladd's school."

Dr. Allday dropped the subject: masters at ladies' schools were not persons who interested him. He returned to the purpose which had brought him to the cottage, and produced the handbill that had been sent to him in Emily's letter.

"I suppose you want to have it back again?" he said.

She took it from him and looked at it with interest.

"Isn't it strange," she suggested, "that the murderer should have escaped, with such a careful description of him as this circulated all over England?"

She read the description to the doctor.

"Name not known. Supposed age between twenty-five and thirty years. A well-made man, of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers. Small, white, well-shaped hands. Wore valuable rings on the last two fingers of the left hand. Dressed neatly—"

"That part of the description is useless," the doctor remarked; "he would change his clothes."

"But could he change his voice?" Emily objected. "Listen to this: 'Remarkably good voice; smooth, full, and persuasive.' And here again: 'Ingratiating manners.' Perhaps you will say he could put on an appearance of rudeness?"

"I will say this, my dear. The one fact that he has not been caught proves that he found a safe hiding-place. With time at his disposal, he would be able to disguise himself so effectually that ninety-nine people out of a hundred would fail to identify him either by his voice or his manner."

"How?"

"Look back at the description: 'Hair cut rather short; clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers.' If the wretch remained long enough in his refuge, don't you see how he could disguise his head and face? No more, my dear, of this disagreeable subject. Let us get to something interesting. Have you found anything else among your aunt's papers?"

"I have met with a great disappointment," Emily replied. "Did I tell you how I discovered the handbill?"

"No."

"I found it, with the scrap-book and the newspaper cuttings, under a collection of empty boxes and bottles, in a drawer of the washhand-stand. And I naturally expected to make far more interesting discoveries in this

room. My search was over in five minutes. Nothing in the cabinet there in the corner but a few books and some china. Nothing in the writing-desk on that side table but a packet of note-paper and some sealing-wax. Nothing here in the drawers but tradesmen's receipts, materials for knitting, and old photographs. She must have destroyed all her papers, poor dear, before her last illness, and the handbill and the other things can only have escaped because they were left in a place which she never thought of examining. Isn't it provoking?"

With a mind inexpressibly relieved, good Dr. Allday asked permission to return to his patients, leaving Emily to devote herself to her friend's letter.

On his way out he noticed that the door of the bed-chamber on the opposite side of the passage stood open. Since Miss Letitia's death the room had not been used. Well within view stood the washhand-stand to which Emily had alluded. The doctor advanced to the house door, reflected, hesitated, and looked toward the empty room.

It had struck him that there might be a second drawer which Emily had overlooked. Would he be justified in setting this doubt at rest? If he passed over ordinary scruples, it would not be without excuse. Miss Letitia had spoken to him of her affairs, and had asked him to act (in Emily's interests) as co-executor with her lawyer. He had complied with the request, conditionally on her not being able to find another executor. The rapid progress of the illness made it impossible for her to execute the necessary codicil. Having been morally (if not legally) taken into her confidence, was Dr. Allday justified in making sure that nothing had been forgotten, when Miss Letitia had destroyed her papers? He decided that he had a right in this serious matter to satisfy his own mind.

A glance was enough to show him that no second drawer had been overlooked.

There was no other discovery to detain the doctor. The wardrobe only contained the poor old lady's clothes; the one cupboard was open and empty. On the point of leaving the room, he went back to the washhand-stand. While he had the opportunity, it might not be amiss to make sure that Emily had thoroughly examined those old boxes and bottles which she had alluded to with some little contempt.

The drawer was of considerable length. When he tried to pull it completely out from the grooves in which it ran, it resisted him. In his present frame of mind this was a suspicious circumstance in itself. He cleared away the litter, so as to make room for the introduction of his hand and arm into the drawer. In another moment his fingers touched a piece of paper jammed between the inner end of the drawer and the bottom of the flat surface of the washhand-stand. With a little care he succeeded in extricating the paper. Only pausing to satisfy himself that there was nothing else to be found, and to close the drawer after replacing its contents, he left the cottage.

The cab was waiting for him. On the drive back to his own house he opened the crumpled paper.

It proved to be a letter addressed to Miss Letitia, and it was signed by no less a person than Emily's school-mistress. Looking back from the end to the beginning, Doctor Allday discovered in the first sentence the name of—Miss Jethro.

But for the interview of that morning with his patient he might have doubted the propriety of making himself further acquainted with the letter. As things were, he read it without hesitation :

"DEAR MADAM,—I can not but regard it as a providential circumstance that your niece, in writing to you from my house, should have mentioned, among other events of her school life, the arrival of my new teacher, Miss Jethro.

"To say that I was surprised is to express very inadequately what I felt when I read your letter, informing me confidentially that I had employed a woman who was unworthy to associate with the young persons placed under my care. It is impossible for me to suppose that a lady in your position, and possessed of your high principles, would make such a serious accusation as this without unanswerable reasons for doing so. At the same time I can not, consistently with my duty as a Christian, suffer my opinion of Miss Jethro to be in any way modified until proofs are laid before me which it is impossible to dispute.

"Placing the same confidence in your discretion which you have placed in mine, I now inclose the references and testimonials which Miss Jethro submitted to me when she presented herself to fill the vacant situation in my school.

"I earnestly request you to lose no time in instituting the confidential inquiries which you have volunteered to make. Whatever the result may be, pray return to me the inclosures which I have trusted to your care, and believe me, dear madam, in much suspense and anxiety, sincerely yours,
AMELIA LADD."

It is needless to describe at any length the impression which these lines produced on the doctor.

If he had heard what Emily had heard at the time of her aunt's last illness, he would have called to mind Miss Letitia's betrayal of her interest in some man unknown, whom she believed to have been beguiled by Miss Jethro, and he would have perceived that the vindictive hatred thus produced must have inspired the letter of denunciation which the school-mistress had acknowledged. He would also have inferred that Miss Letitia's inquiries had proved her accusation to be well founded if he had known of the new teacher's sudden dismissal from the school. As things were, he was merely confirmed in his bad opinion of Miss Jethro; and he was induced, on reflection, to keep his discovery to himself.

"If poor Miss Emily saw the old lady exhibited in the character of an informer," he thought, "what a blow would be struck at her innocent respect for the memory of her aunt!"

CHAPTER XIX.

SIR JERVIS REDWOOD.

IN the mean time, Emily, left by herself, had her own correspondence to occupy her attention.

Besides the letter from Cecilia (directed to the care of Sir Jervis Redwood), she had received some lines addressed to her by Sir Jervis himself. The two inclosures had been secured in a sealed envelope directed to the cottage.

If Alban Morris had been indeed the person trusted as messenger by Sir Jervis, the conclusion that followed filled Emily with overpowering emotions of curiosity and surprise.

Having no longer the motive of serving and protecting her, Alban must, nevertheless, have taken the journey to Northumberland. He must have gained Sir Jervis Redwood's favor and confidence, and he might even have been a guest at the baronet's country-seat when Cecilia's letter arrived. What did it mean?

Emily looked back at her recollections of her last day at school.

The one explanation of Alban's strange employment of his holiday leisure which suggested itself seemed to be connected with his inveterate distrust of Mrs. Rook. Was it assuming too much to find this a sufficient motive for his following Sir Jervis's housekeeper on her return to her master's place of abode?

What had happened there, if this was the right reading of the riddle?

Suddenly, almost irritably, Emily snatched up Sir Jervis's letter. Before the doctor had come in she had glanced at it, and had thrown it aside in her impatience to read what Cecilia had written. In her present altered frame of mind, she was inclined to think that Sir Jervis might be the more interesting correspondent of the two.

On returning to his letter, she was disappointed at the outset.

In the first place, his handwriting was so abominably bad—he had such an exasperating habit of writing the first two or three letters of long words, and then depending on a crooked line to represent the rest—that she was obliged to guess at his meaning. In the second place, he never hinted at the circumstances under which Cecilia's letter had been confided to the gentleman who had left it at her door.

She would once more have treated the baronet's communication with contempt, but for the discovery that it contained an offer of employment in London, addressed to herself.

Sir Jervis had necessarily been obliged to engage another secretary in Emily's absence; but he was still in want of a person to serve his literary interests in London. He had reason to believe that discoveries made by modern travellers in Central America had been reported from time to time by the English press; and he wished copies to be taken of any notices of this sort which might be found on referring to the files of newspapers kept

In the reading-room of the British Museum. If Emily considered herself capable of contributing in this way to the completeness of his great work on "the ruined cities," and if she was "sufficiently sensible, at her age, to feel that the best remedy against any sorrow that she might be suffering consisted in helping him," she had only to apply to his bookseller in London, who would pay her the customary remuneration, and give her every assistance of which she might stand in need. The bookseller's name and address followed (with nothing legible but the words "Bond Street"); and there was an end to Sir Jervis's proposal.

Emily laid it aside, deferring her answer until she had read Cecilia's letter.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REVEREND MILES MIRABEL.

"I AM making a little excursion from the Engadine, my dearest of all dear friends. Two charming fellow-travellers take care of me; and we may perhaps get as far as the Lake of Como.

"My sister (already much improved in health) remains at St. Moritz with the old governess. The moment I know what exact course we are going to take, I shall write to Julia to forward any letters which arrive in my absence. My life, in this earthly paradise, will be only complete when I hear from my darling Emily.

"In the mean time we are staying for the night at some interesting place, the name of which I have unaccountably forgotten; and here I am in my room, writing to you at last, dying to know if Sir Jervis has yet thrown himself at your feet, and offered to make you Lady Redwood with magnificent settlements.

"But you are waiting to hear who my new friends are. My dear, one of them is, next to yourself, the most delightful creature in existence. Society knows her as Lady Janeaway. I love her already by her Christian name; she is my friend Doris. And she reciprocates my sentiments.

"You will now understand that union of sympathies made us acquainted with each other.

"If there is anything in me to be proud of, I think it must be my admirable appetite. And if I have a passion, the name of it is Pastry. Here again Lady Doris reciprocates my sentiments. We sit next to each other at the *table d'hôte*.

"Good heavens! I have forgotten her husband. They have been married rather more than a month. Did I tell you that she is just two years older than I am?

"I declare I am forgetting him again! He is Lord Janeaway. Such a quiet, modest man, and so easily amused! He carries about with him everywhere a dirty little tin case, with air-holes in the cover. He goes softly poking about among bushes and brambles, and under rocks, and behind old wooden houses. When he has caught some hideous insect that makes one shudder, he blushes with pleasure, and looks at his wife and me, and says, with the prettiest lisp, 'This is what I call enjoying the day.' To see the manner in which he obeys her is, between ourselves, to feel proud of being a woman.

"Where was I? Oh! at the *table d'hôte*.

"Never, Emily—I say it with a solemn sense of the claims of truth—never have I eaten such an infamous, abominable, maddeningly bad dinner as the dinner they gave us on our first day at the hotel. I ask you if I am not patient; I appeal to your own recollection of occasions when I have exhibited extraordinary self-control. My dear, I held out until they brought the pastry round. I took one bite, and committed the most shocking offense against good manners at table that you can imagine. My handkerchief, my poor innocent handkerchief, received the horrid—please suppose the rest. My hair stands on end when I think of it. Our neighbors at the table saw me. The coarse men laughed. The sweet young bride, sincerely feeling for me, said, 'Will you allow me to shake hands? I did exactly what you have done the day before yesterday.' Such was the beginning of my friendship with Lady Doris Janeaway.

"We are two resolute women—I mean that *she* is resolute, and that I follow her—and we have asserted our right of dining to our own satisfaction by means of an interview with the chief cook.

"This interesting person is an ex-Zouave in the French army. Instead of making excuses, he confessed that the barbarous tastes of the English and American visitors had so discouraged him that he had lost all pride and pleasure in the exercise of his art. As an example of what he meant, he mentioned his experience of two young Englishmen who could speak no foreign language. The waiters reported that they objected to their breakfasts, and especially to the eggs. Thereupon (to translate the Frenchman's own way of putting it) he exhausted himself in exquisite preparations of eggs. *Eggs à la tripe, au gratin, à l'Aurore, à la Dauphine, à la Poulette, à la Tartare, à la Vénitienne, à la Bordelaise*, and so on, and so on. Still the two young gentlemen were not satisfied. The ex-Zouave, infuriated, wounded in his honor, disgraced as a professor, insisted on an explanation. What, in Heaven's name, *did* they want for breakfast? They wanted boiled eggs, and a fish which they called a *Bloaterre*. It was impossible, he said, to express his contempt for the English idea of a breakfast, in the presence of ladies. You know how a cat expresses herself in the presence of a dog, and you will understand the allusion. Oh, Emily, what dinners we have had in our own room since we spoke to the cook!

"Have I any more news to send to you? Are you interested, my dear, in eloquent young clergymen?

"On our first appearance at the public table we noticed a remarkable air of depression among the ladies. Had some adventurous gentleman tried to climb a mountain and failed? Had disastrous political news arrived from England—a defeat of the Conservatives, for instance? Had a revolution in the fashions broken out in Paris, and had all our best dresses become of no earthly value to us? I applied for information to the only lady present who shone on the company with a cheerful face—my friend Doris, of course.

"'What day was yesterday?' she asked.

"'Sunday,' I answered.

"'Of all melancholy Sundays,' she continued, 'the most melancholy in the calendar. Mr. Miles Mirabel preached his farewell sermon, in our temporary chapel upstairs.'

"And you have not recovered from it yet?"

"We are all heart-broken, Miss Wyvil."

"This naturally interested me. I asked what sort of sermons Mr. Mirabel preached. Lady Janeaway said: 'Come up to our room after dinner. The subject is too distressing to be discussed in public.'

"She began by making me personally acquainted with the reverend gentleman; that is to say, she showed me the photographic portraits of him. They were two in number. One only presented his face. The other exhibited him at full length, adorned in his surplice. Every lady in the congregation had received the two photographs as a farewell present. 'My portraits,' Lady Doris remarked, 'are the only complete specimens. The others have been irretrievably ruined by tears.'

"You will now expect a personal description of this fascinating man. What the photographs failed to tell me, my friend was so kind as to complete from the resources of her own experience. Here is the result, presented to the best of my ability.

"He is young—not yet thirty years of age. His complexion is fair; his features are delicate; his eyes are clear blue. He has pretty hands, and rings prettier still. And such a voice, and such manners! You will say there are plenty of pet parsons who answer to this description. Wait a little—I have kept his chief distinction till the last. His beautiful light hair flows in profusion over his shoulders; and his glossy beard waves, at apostolic length, down to the lower buttons of his waistcoat.

"What do you think of the Reverend Miles Mirabel now?"

"The life and adventures of our charming young clergyman bear eloquent testimony to the saintly patience of his disposition under trials which would have overwhelmed an ordinary man. (Lady Doris, please notice, quotes in this place the language of his admirers; and I report Lady Doris.)

"He has been clerk in a lawyer's office—unjustly dismissed. He has given readings from Shakespeare—infamously neglected. He has been secretary to a promenade concert company—deceived by a penniless manager. He has been employed in negotiations for making foreign railways—repudiated by an unprincipled government. He has been translator to a publishing house—declared incapable by envious newspapers and reviews. He has taken refuge in dramatic criticism—dismissed by a corrupt editor. Through all these means of purification for the priestly career he passed at last into the one sphere that was worthy of him: he entered the Church, under the protection of influential friends. Oh, happy change! From that moment his labors have been blessed. Twice already he has been presented with silver tea-pots filled with sovereigns. Go where he may, precious sympathies environ him; and domestic affection places his knife and fork at innumerable family tables. After a Continental career, which will leave undying recollections, he is now recalled to England—at the suggestion of a person of distinction in the Church, who prefers a mild climate. It will now be his valued privilege to represent an absent rector in a country living, remote from cities, secluded in pastoral solitude, among simple breeders of sheep. May the shepherd prove worthy of the flock!

"Here again, my dear, I must give the merit where the merit is due. This memoir of Mr. Mirabel is not of my writing. It formed part of his farewell sermon, preserved in the memory of Lady Doris: and it shows

(once more in the language of his admirers) that the truest humility may be found in the character of the most gifted man.

"Let me only add that you will have opportunities of seeing and hearing this popular preacher, when circumstances permit him to address congregations in the large towns. I am at the end of my news; and I begin to feel—after this long, long letter—that it is time to go to bed. Need I say that I have often spoken of you to Doris, and that she entreats you to be her friend as well as mine when we meet again in England?"

"Good-by, darling, for the present. With fondest love, your

"CECILIA."

"P.S.—I have formed a new habit. In case of feeling hungry in the night, I keep a box of chocolate under the pillow. You have no idea what a comfort it is. If I ever meet with the man who fulfills my ideal, I shall make it a condition of the marriage settlement that I am to have chocolate under the pillow."

CHAPTER XXI.

POLLY AND SALLY.

WITHOUT a care to trouble her; abroad or at home finding inexhaustible varieties of amusement; seeing new places, making new acquaintances—what a disheartening contrast did Cecilia's happy life present to the life of her friend! Who, in Emily's position, could have read that joyously written letter from Switzerland and not have lost heart and faith, for the moment at least, as the inevitable result?

A buoyant temperament is of all moral qualities the most precious, in this respect: it is the one force in us—when virtuous resolution proves insufficient—which resists by instinct the stealthy approaches of despair. "I shall only cry," Emily thought, "if I stay at home; better go out."

Observant persons, accustomed to frequent the London parks, can hardly have failed to notice the number of solitary strangers sadly endeavoring to vary their lives by taking a walk. They linger about the flower beds; they sit for hours on the benches; they look with patient curiosity at other people who have companions; they notice ladies on horseback and children at play with submissive interest; some of the men find company in a pipe, without appearing to enjoy it; some of the women find a substitute for dinner in little dry biscuits wrapped in crumpled scraps of paper; they are not sociable; they are hardly ever seen to make acquaintance with each other; perhaps they are shamefaced, or proud, or sullen; perhaps they despair of others, being accustomed to despair of themselves; perhaps they have their reasons for never venturing to encounter curiosity, or their vices which dread detection, or their virtues which suffer hardship with the resignation that is sufficient for itself. The one thing certain is, that these unfortunate people resist discovery. We know that they are strangers in London, and we know no more.

And Emily was one of them.

Among the other forlorn wanderers in the parks there appeared latterly a trim little figure in black (with the face protected from notice behind a crape veil), which was beginning to be familiar, day after day, to nurse-

maids and children, and to rouse curiosity among harmless solitaries meditating on benches, and idle vagabonds strolling over the grass. The woman-servant whom the considerate doctor had provided was the one person in Emily's absence left to take care of the house. There was no other creature who could be a companion to the friendless girl. Mrs. Ellmother had never shown herself again since the funeral. Mrs. Mosey could not forget that she had been (no matter how politely) requested to withdraw. To whom could Emily say, "Let us go out for a walk"? She had communicated the news of her aunt's death to Miss Ladd, at Brighton, and had heard from Francine. The worthy school-mistress had written to her with the truest kindness. "Choose your own time, my poor child, and come and stay with me at Brighton; the sooner the better." Emily shrank—not from accepting the invitation—but from encountering Francine. The hard West Indian heiress looked harder than ever with a pen in her hand. Her letter announced that she was getting on wretchedly with her studies (which she hated); she found the masters appointed to instruct her ugly and disagreeable (and loathed the sight of them); she had taken a dislike to Miss Ladd (and time only confirmed that unfavorable impression); Brighton was always the same; the sea was always the same; the drives were always the same. Francine felt a presentiment that she should do something desperate, unless Emily joined her, and made Brighton endurable behind the horrid school-mistress's back. Solitude in London was a privilege and a pleasure, viewed as the alternative to such companionship as this. Emily wrote gratefully to Miss Ladd, and asked to be excused.

Other days had passed drearily since that time; but the one day that had brought with it Cecilia's letter set past happiness and present sorrow together so vividly and so cruelly that Emily's courage sank. She had forced back the tears in her lonely home; she had gone out to seek consolation and encouragement under the sunny sky; to find comfort for her sore heart in the radiant summer beauty of flowers and grass, in the sweet breathing of the air, in the happy heavenward soaring of the birds. No! Mother Nature is step-mother to the sick at heart. Soon, too soon, she could hardly see where she went. Again and again she resolutely cleared her eyes, under the shelter of her veil, when passing strangers noticed her, and again and again the tears found their way back. Oh, if the girls at the school were to see her now—the girls who used to say, in their moments of sadness, "Let us go to Emily and be cheered"—would they know her again? She sat down to rest and recover herself on the nearest bench. It was unoccupied. No passing footsteps were audible on the remote path to which she had strayed. Solitude at home! Solitude in the Park! Where was Cecilia at that moment? In Italy, among the lakes and mountains, happy in the company of her light-hearted friend.

The lonely interval passed, and persons came near. Two sisters, girls like herself, stopped to rest on the bench.

They were full of their own interests; they hardly looked at the stranger in mourning garments. The younger sister was to be married, and the elder was to be bridesmaid. They talked of their dresses and their presents; they compared the dashing bridegroom of the one with the timid lover of the other; they laughed over their own small sallies of wit, over their joyous dreams of the future, over their opinions of the guests invited to the

wedding. Too joyfully restless to remain inactive any longer, they jumped up again from the seat. One of them said, "Polly, I'm too happy!" and danced as she moved away. The other cried, "Sally, for shame!" and burst out laughing as if she had hit on the most irresistible joke that ever was made.

Emily rose and went home.

By some mysterious influence which she was unable to trace the boisterous merriment of the two girls had roused in her a sense of revolt against the life that she was leading. Change, speedy change, to some occupation that would force her to exert herself, presented the one promise of brighter days that she could see. To feel this was to be inevitably reminded of Sir Jervis Redwood. Here was a man, who had never even seen her, transformed by the incomprehensible operation of Chance into the friend of whom she stood in need—the friend who pointed the way to a new world of action, the busy world of readers in the library of the Museum.

Before the week was out Emily had accepted Sir Jervis's proposal, and had so interested the bookseller to whom she had been directed to apply that he took it on himself to modify the arbitrary instructions of her employer.

"The old gentleman has no mercy on himself, and no mercy on others," he exclaimed, "where his literary labors are concerned. You must spare yourself, Miss Emily. It is not only absurd, it's cruel, to expect you to ransack old newspapers for discoveries in Yucatan, from the time when Stephens published his *Travels in Central America*—nearly forty years since. Begin with back numbers published within a few years—say five years from the present date—and let us see what your search over that interval will bring forth."

Accepting this friendly advice, Emily began with the newspaper volume dating from New-Year's Day, 1876.

The first hour of her search strengthened the sincere sense of gratitude with which she remembered the bookseller's kindness. To keep her attention steadily fixed on the one subject that interested her employer, and to resist the temptation to read those miscellaneous items of news which especially interest women, put her patience and resolution to a merciless test. Happily for herself, her neighbors on either side were no idlers. To see them so absorbed over their work that they never once looked at her, after the first moment when she took her place between them, was to find exactly the example of which she stood most in need. As the hours wore on she pursued her weary way, down one column and up another, resigned at least (if not quite reconciled yet) to her task. Her labors ended, for the day, with such encouragement as she might derive from the conviction of having (thus far) honestly pursued a useless search.

News was waiting for her when she reached home which raised her sinking spirits. On leaving the cottage that morning she had given certain instructions relating to the modest stranger who had taken charge of her correspondence, in case of his paying a second visit during her absence at the Museum. The first words spoken by the servant, on opening the door, informed her that the unknown gentleman had called again. This time he had boldly left his card. There was the name, already familiar, already welcome—Alban Morris.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALBAN MORRIS.

HAVING looked at the visitor's card, Emily put her first question to the servant.

"Did you tell Mr. Morris what your orders were?" she asked.

"Yes, miss; I said I was to have shown him in, if you had been at home. Perhaps I did wrong; I told him what you told me when you went out this morning—I said you had gone to read at the Museum."

"What makes you think you did wrong?"

"Well, miss, he didn't say anything, but he looked upset."

"Do you mean that he looked angry?"

The servant shook her head. "Not exactly angry—puzzled and put out."

"Did he leave any message?"

"He said he would call later, if you would be so good as to receive him."

In half an hour more, Alban and Emily were together again. The light fell full on her face as she rose to receive him.

"Oh, how you have suffered!"

The words escaped him before he could restrain himself. He looked at her with the tender sympathy, so precious to women, which she had not seen in the face of any human creature since the loss of her aunt. Even the good doctor's efforts to console her had been efforts of professional routine—the inevitable result of his life-long familiarity with sorrow and death. While Alban's eyes rested on her, Emily felt her tears rising. In the fear that he might misinterpret her reception of him, she made the effort to speak with some appearance of composure.

"I lead a lonely life," she said, "and I can well understand that my face shows it. You are one of my very few friends, Mr. Morris"—her voice faltered; it discouraged her to see him standing irresolute, with his hat in his hand, fearful of intruding on her. "Indeed, indeed, you are welcome," she said, very earnestly.

In those sad days her heart was easily touched. She gave him her hand for the second time. He held it gently for a moment. Every day since they had parted she had been in his thoughts; she had become dearer to him than ever. He was too deeply affected to trust himself to answer. That silence pleaded for him as nothing had pleaded for him yet. In her secret self she remembered with wonder how she had received his confession in the school garden. It was a little hard on him, surely, to have forbidden him even to hope.

Conscious of her own weakness—even while giving way to it—she felt the necessity of turning his attention from herself. In some confusion she pointed to a chair at her side, and spoke of his first visit, when he had left her letters at the door. Having confided to him all that she had discovered, and all that she had guessed, on that occasion, it was by an easy transition that she alluded to the motive for his journey to the North.

"I thought it might be suspicion of Mrs. Rook," she said. "Was I mistaken?"

"No; you were right."

"They were serious suspicions, I suppose?"

"Certainly! I should not otherwise have devoted my holiday-time to clearing them up."

"May I know what they were?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you," he began.

"But you would rather not answer my question," she interposed.

"I would rather hear you tell me if you have made any other guess."

"One more, Mr. Morris. I guessed that you had become acquainted with Sir Jervis Redwood."

"For the second time you have arrived at a sound conclusion. My one hope of finding opportunities for observing Sir Jervis's housekeeper depended on my chance of gaining admission to Sir Jervis's house."

"How did you succeed? Perhaps you provided yourself with a letter of introduction?"

"I knew nobody who could introduce me," Alban replied. "As the event proved, a letter would have been needless. Sir Jervis introduced himself—and, more wonderful still, he invited me to his house at our first interview."

"Sir Jervis introduced himself?" Emily repeated, in amazement. "From Cecilia's description of him, I should have thought he was the last person in the world to do that."

Alban smiled. "And you would like to know how it happened?"

"The very favor I was going to ask of you," she replied.

Instead of at once complying with her wishes, he paused—hesitated—and made a strange request. "Will you forgive my rudeness if I ask leave to walk up and down the room while I talk? I am a restless man. Walking up and down helps me to express myself freely."

Her face brightened for the first time. "How like You that is!" she exclaimed.

Alban looked at her with surprise and delight. She had betrayed an interest in studying his character, which he appreciated at its full value. "I should never have dared to hope," he said, "that you knew me so well already."

"You are forgetting your story," she reminded him.

He moved to the opposite side of the room, where there were fewest impediments in the shape of furniture. With his head down, and his hands crossed behind him, he paced to and fro. Habit made him express himself in his usual quaint way, but he became embarrassed as he went on. Was he disturbed by his recollections, or by the fear of taking Emily into his confidence too freely?

"Different people have different ways of telling a story," he said. "Mine is the methodical way—I begin at the beginning. We will start, if you please, in the railway. When I got to the end of my journey I might as well have returned by the next train—if I had not been an artist. The station was a hut in a wilderness. The village (deriving its sole importance from being near a mine) was hidden in a hole; it was not even visible from the railway. No matter; it was the nearest place to Sir Jervis's house, and

it was therefore my destination. I picked out the biggest of the cottages—I mean the huts—and asked the woman at the door if she had a bed to let. She evidently thought me either mad or drunk. I wasted no time in persuasion; the right person to plead my cause was asleep in her arms. I began by admiring the baby, and I ended by taking the baby's portrait. From that moment I became a member of the family—the member who had his own way. Besides the room occupied by the husband and wife, there was a sort of kennel in which the husband's brother slept. He was dismissed (with five shillings of mine to comfort him) to find shelter somewhere else, and I was promoted to the vacant place. It is my misfortune to be tall. When I went to bed I slept with my head on the pillow and my feet out of the window. Very cool and pleasant in summer weather. The next morning I set my trap for Sir Jervis."

"Your trap?" Emily repeated, wondering what he meant.

"I went out to sketch from Nature," Alban continued. "Can anybody (with or without a title—I don't care), living in a lonely country house, see a stranger hard at work with a color-box and brushes, and not stop to look at what he is doing? Three days passed, and nothing happened. I was quite patient; the grand open country all round me offered lessons of inestimable value in what we call aerial perspective. On the fourth day, I was absorbed over the hardest of all hard tasks in landscape art, studying the clouds straight from Nature. The magnificent moorland silence was suddenly profaned by a man's voice, speaking (or rather croaking) behind me. 'The worst curse of human life,' the voice said, 'is the detestable necessity of taking exercise. I hate losing my time; I hate fine scenery; I hate fresh air; I hate a pony. Go on, you brute.' Being too deeply engaged with the clouds to look round, I had supposed this pretty speech to be addressed to some second person. Nothing of the sort; the croaking voice had a habit of speaking to itself. In a minute more there came within my range of view a solitary old man, mounted on a rough pony."

"Was it Sir Jervis?"

Alban hesitated.

"It looked more like the popular notion of the devil," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Morris!"

"I give you my first impression, Miss Emily, for what it is worth. He had his high-peaked hat in his hand to keep his head cool. His wiry iron-gray hair looked like hair standing on end; his bushy eyebrows curled upward toward his narrow temples; his horrid old globular eyes stared with a wicked brightness; his pointed beard hid his chin; he was covered from his throat to his ankles in a loose black garment, something between a coat and a cloak; and, to complete him, he had a club-foot. I don't doubt that Sir Jervis Redwood is the earthly alias which he finds convenient, but I stick to that first impression which appeared to surprise you. 'Ha! an artist; you seem to be the sort of chap I want!' In those terms he introduced himself. Observe, if you please, that my trap caught him the moment he came my way. Who wouldn't be an artist?"

"Did he take a liking to you?" Emily inquired.

"Not he! I don't believe he ever took a liking to anybody in his life."

"Then how did you get your invitation to his house?"

"Give me a little breathing-time, Miss Emily, and you shall hear."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS REDWOOD.

"I got invited to Sir Jervis's house," Alban resumed, "by treating the old savage as unceremoniously as he had treated me. 'That's an idle trade of yours,' he said, looking at my sketch. 'Other ignorant people have made the same remark,' I answered. He rode away like a man who was not used to be spoken to in that manner, and then thought better of it, and came back. 'Do you understand wood-engraving?' he asked. 'Yes.' 'And etching?' 'I have practiced etching myself.' 'Are you a Royal Academician?' 'I'm a drawing master at a ladies' school.' 'Whose school?' 'Miss Ladd's.' 'Damn it, you know the girl who ought to have been my secretary.' I am not quite sure whether you will take it as a compliment, Sir Jervis appeared to view you in the light of a reference to my respectability. At any rate he went on with his questions. 'How long do you stop in these parts?' 'I haven't made up my mind.' 'Look here; I want to consult you—are you listening?' 'No; I'm sketching.' He burst into a horrid scream. I asked if he felt himself taken ill. 'Ill?' he said

'I'm laughing.' It was a diabolical laugh, in one syllable—not 'ha! ha! ha!' only 'ha!'—and it made him look wonderfully like that eminent person whom I persist in thinking he resembles. 'You're an impudent dog,' he said. 'Where are you living?' He was so delighted when he heard of my uncomfortable position in the kennel-bedroom that he offered his hospitality on the spot. 'I can't go to you in such a pig-sty as that,' he said; 'you must come to me. What's your name?' 'Alban Morris. What's yours?' 'Jervis Redwood. Pack up your traps when you've done your job, and come and try my kennel. There it is, in a corner of your drawing, and devilish like, too.' I packed up my traps, and I tried his kennel. And now you have had enough of Sir Jervis Redwood."

"Not half enough!" Emily answered. "Your story leaves off just at the interesting moment. I want you to take me into Sir Jervis's house."

"And I want you, Miss Emily, to take me into the reading-room of the Museum."

Emily's observation of him, when he alluded in this way to her new employment, did not lead her to form the same impression which had been produced on the servant. Instead of appearing to be "puzzled," his manner suggested that there was some foregone conclusion in his mind, which he was putting to the test.

"Is your reading a secret?" he asked.

"Not the least in the world! I am only reading old newspapers."

He repeated the last words to himself. "Old newspapers?" he said, as if he was not quite sure of having rightly understood her.

She tried to help him by a more definite reply.

"I am looking through old newspapers," she resumed, "beginning with the year eighteen hundred and seventy-six."

"And going back from that time," he asked, eagerly, "to earlier dates still?"

"No; just the contrary; advancing from 'seventy-six to the present time."

He suddenly turned pale, and tried to hide his face from her by looking out of the window. For a moment his agitation deprived him of his presence of mind. In that moment she saw that she had alarmed him.

He was either unable or unwilling to speak again. The effect produced on Emily by the betrayal of emotion which had escaped him made her insensible to every consideration of prudence. "What have I said to frighten you?" she asked.

He tried to assume a tone of commonplace gallantry. "There are limits even to your power over me," he replied. "Whatever else you may do, you can never frighten me."

"Do you think I am the sort of person to be satisfied with such an answer as that?" she rejoined. "You might have found a better way of telling me that I have spoken indiscreetly."

"Severe—but I have deserved it," he said. "You did startle me; and I was a fool not to own it. Are you searching those old newspapers with any particular object in view?"

"Yes."

"May I know what it is?"

"May I know why I frightened you?"

He began to walk up and down the room again, then checked himself abruptly, and appealed to her mercy.

"Don't be hard on me," he pleaded. "I am so fond of you—oh, forgive me! I only mean that it distresses me to have any concealments from you. If I could open my whole heart at this moment, I should be a happier man."

She understood him and believed him. "My curiosity shall never embarrass you again," she answered, warmly. "I won't even remember that I wanted to hear how you got on in Sir Jervis's house."

His gratitude seized the opportunity of taking her harmlessly into his confidence. "As Sir Jervis's guest," he said, "my experience is at your service. Only tell me how I can interest you."

She suggested, with some hesitation, that Alban might tell her what happened at his first interview with Mrs. Rook. To her surprise and relief he at once complied with her wishes.

"We met," he said, "on the evening when I first entered the house. Sir Jervis took me into the dining-room, and there sat Miss Redwood, with a large black cat on her lap. Older than her brother, taller than her brother, leaner than her brother, with strange stony eyes, and a skin like parchment, she looked (if I may speak in contradictions) like a living corpse. I was presented, and the corpse revived. The last lingering relics of former good-breeding showed themselves faintly in her bow and in her smile. You will hear more of Miss Redwood presently. In the mean while Sir Jervis made me reward his hospitality by professional advice. He wished me to decide whether the artists whom he had employed to illustrate his wonderful book had cheated him by overcharges and bad work, and Mrs. Rook was sent to fetch the engravings from his study up-

stairs. You remember her petrified appearance when she first read the inscription on your locket? The same result followed when she found herself face to face with me. I saluted her civilly—she was deaf and blind to my politeness. Her master snatched the illustrations out of her hand, and told her to leave the room. She stood stock-still, staring helplessly. Sir Jervis looked round at his sister, and I followed his example. Miss Redwood was observing the housekeeper too attentively to notice anything else; her brother was obliged to speak to her. 'Try Rook with the bell,' he said. Miss Redwood took a fine old bronze hand-bell from the table at her side and rang it. At the shrill silvery sound of the bell Mrs. Rook put her hand to her head as if the ringing had hurt her, turned instantly, and left us. 'Nobody can manage Rook but my sister,' Sir Jervis explained; 'Rook is crazy.' Miss Redwood differed with him. 'No!' she said. Only one word, but there were volumes of contradiction in it. Sir Jervis looked at me slyly, meaning, perhaps, that he thought his sister crazy too. The dinner was brought in at the same moment, and my attention was diverted to Mrs. Rook's husband."

"What was he like?" Emily asked.

"I really can't tell you; he was one of those essentially commonplace persons whom one never looks at a second time. His dress was shabby, his head was bald, and his hands shook when he waited on us at table—and that is all I remember. Sir Jervis and I feasted on salt fish, mutton, and beer. Miss Redwood had cold broth, with a wine-glassful of rum poured into it by Mr. Rook. 'She's got no stomach,' her brother informed me; 'hot things come up again ten minutes after they have gone down her throat; she lives on that beastly mixture, and calls it broth-grog!' Miss Redwood sipped her elixir of life, and occasionally looked at me with an appearance of interest which I was at a loss to understand. Dinner being over, she rang her antique bell. The shabby old man-servant answered her call. 'Where's your wife?' she inquired. 'Ill, miss.' She took Mr. Rook's arm to go out, and stopped as she passed me. 'Come to my room, if you please, sir, to-morrow at two o'clock,' she said. Sir Jervis explained again: 'She's all to pieces in the morning' (he invariably called his sister 'she'), 'and gets patched up toward the middle of the day. Death has forgotten her—that's about the truth of it.' He lit his pipe, and pondered over the hieroglyphics found among the ruined cities of Yucatan; I lit my pipe, and read the only book I could find in the dining-room—a dreadful record of shipwrecks and disasters at sea. When the room was full of tobacco smoke we fell asleep in our chairs, and when we woke again we got up and went to bed. There is the true story of my first evening in Sir Jervis Redwood's house."

Emily begged him to go on. "You have interested me in Miss Redwood," she said. "You kept your appointment, of course?"

"I kept my appointment in no very pleasant humor. Encouraged by my favorable report of the illustrations which he had submitted to my judgment, Sir Jervis proposed to make me useful to him in a new capacity. 'You have nothing particular to do,' he said. 'Suppose you clean my pictures?' I gave him one of my black looks, and made no other reply. My interview with his sister tried my powers of self-command in another way. Miss Redwood declared her purpose in sending for me the moment I en-

tered her room. Without any preliminary remarks—speaking slowly and emphatically, in a wonderfully strong voice for a woman of her age—she said: ‘I have a favor to ask of you, sir. I want you to tell me what Mrs. Rook has done.’ I was so staggered that I stared at her like a fool. She went on, ‘I suspected Mrs. Rook, sir, of having guilty remembrances on her conscience, before she had been a week in our service.’ Can you imagine my astonishment when I found that Miss Redwood’s view of Mrs. Rook was my view? Finding that I still said nothing, the old lady entered into details: ‘We arranged, sir’ (she persisted in calling me ‘sir,’ with the formal politeness of the old school)—‘we arranged, sir, that Mrs. Rook and her husband should occupy the bedroom next to mine, so that I might have her near me in case of my being taken ill in the night. She looked at the door between the two rooms—suspicious! She asked if there was any objection to her changing to another room—suspicious! She (or her husband) stuffed an old handkerchief into the keyhole, fearing, no doubt, that I might listen or peep—suspicious! suspicious! Pray take a seat, sir, and tell me which Mrs. Rook is guilty of—theft or murder?’”

“What a dreadful old woman!” Emily exclaimed. “How did you answer her?”

“I told her, with perfect truth, that I knew nothing of Mrs. Rook’s secrets. Miss Redwood’s humor took a satirical turn. ‘Allow me to ask, sir, whether your eyes were shut when our housekeeper found herself unexpectedly in your presence?’ I referred the old lady to her brother’s opinion. ‘Sir Jervis believes Mrs. Rook to be crazy,’ I reminded her. ‘Do you refuse to trust me, sir?’ ‘I have no information to give you, madam.’ She waved her skinny old hand in the direction of the door. I made my bow, and retired. She called me back. ‘Old women used to be prophets, sir, in the by-gone time,’ she said. ‘I will venture on a prediction. You will be the means of depriving us of the services of Mr. and Mrs. Rook. If you will be so good as to stay here a day or two longer, you will hear that those two people have given us notice to quit. It will be her doing, mind—he is a mere cipher. I wish you good-morning.’ Will you believe me, when I tell you that the prophecy was fulfilled?”

“Do you mean that they actually left the house?”

“They would certainly have left the house,” Alban answered, “if Sir Jervis had not insisted on receiving the customary month’s warning. He asserted his resolution by locking up the old husband in the pantry. His sister’s suspicions never entered his head; the housekeeper’s conduct (he said) simply proved that she was, what he had always considered her to be, crazy. ‘A capital servant, in spite of that drawback,’ he remarked; ‘and, you will see, I shall bring her to her senses.’ The impression produced on me was naturally of a very different kind. While I was still uncertain how to entrap Mrs. Rook into confirming my suspicions, she herself had saved me the trouble. She had placed her own guilty interpretation on my appearance in the house: I had driven her away!”

Emily remained true to her resolution not to let her curiosity embarrass Alban again. But the unexpressed question was in her thoughts—“of what guilt does he suspect Mrs. Rook? And, when he first felt his suspicions, was my father in his mind?”

Alban proceeded:

"I had only to consider next whether I could hope to make any further discoveries if I continued to be Sir Jervis's guest. The object of my journey had been gained, and I had no desire to be employed as picture-cleaner. Miss Redwood assisted me in arriving at a decision. I was sent for to speak to her again. The success of her prophecy had raised her spirits. She asked, with ironical humility, if I proposed to honor them by still remaining their guest after the disturbance that I had provoked. I answered that I proposed to leave by the first train the next morning. 'Will it be convenient for you to travel to some place at a good distance from this part of the world?' she asked. I had my own reasons for going to London, and said so. 'Will you mention that to my brother this evening, just before we sit down to dinner?' she continued. 'And will you tell him plainly that you have no intention of returning to the north? I shall make use of Mrs. Rook's arm as usual, to help me down-stairs, and I will take care that she hears what you say. Without venturing on another prophecy, I will only hint to you that I have my own idea of what will happen, and I should like you to see for yourself, sir, whether my anticipations are realized.' Need I tell you that this strange old woman proved to be right once more? Mr. Rook was released; Mrs. Rook made humble apologies, and laid the whole blame on her husband's temper; and Sir Jervis bade me remark that his method had succeeded in bringing the housekeeper to her senses. Such were the results produced by the announcement of my departure for London, purposely made in Mrs. Rook's hearing. Do you agree with me that my journey to Northumberland has not been taken in vain?"

Once more Emily felt the necessity of controlling herself.

Alban had said that he had "reasons of his own for going to London." Could she venture to ask him what those reasons were? She could only persist in restraining her curiosity, and conclude that he would have mentioned his motive if it had been (as she had at one time supposed) connected with herself. It was a wise decision. No earthly consideration would have induced Alban to answer her if she had put the question to him.

All doubt of the correctness of his own first impression was now at an end; he was convinced that Mrs. Rook had been an accomplice in the crime committed in 1877 at the village inn. His object in travelling to London was to consult the newspaper narrative of the murder. He too had been one of the readers at the Museum—had examined the back numbers of the newspaper—and had arrived at the conclusion that Emily's father had been the victim of the crime. Unless he found means to prevent it, her course of reading would take her from the year 1876 to the year 1877, and under that date she would see the fatal report heading the top of a column, and printed in conspicuous type.

In the mean while Emily had broken the silence, before it could lead to embarrassing results, by asking if Alban had seen Mrs. Rook again on the morning when he left Sir Jervis's house.

"I saw nobody," Alban replied, "but Sir Jervis himself. He still held to his idea of having his pictures cleaned for nothing. 'If you can't do it yourself,' he said, 'couldn't you teach my secretary?' He described the lady whom he has engaged in your place as 'a nasty middle-aged woman, with a perpetual cold in her head.' At the same time (he remarked) he

was a friend to the women, 'because he got them cheap.' I declined to teach the unfortunate secretary the art of picture-cleaning. Finding me determined, Sir Jervis was quite ready to say good-by. But he made use of me to the last. He employed me as postman, and saved a stamp. The letter addressed to you arrived at breakfast-time. Sir Jervis said, 'You're going to London; suppose you take it with you?'

"Did he tell you that there was a letter of his own inclosed in the envelope?"

"No. When he gave me the envelope it was already sealed."

Emily at once handed to him Sir Jervis's letter. "That will tell you who employs me at the Museum, and what my work is," she said.

He looked through the letter, and at once offered—eagerly offered—to help her.

"I have been a student in the reading-room at intervals for years past," he said. "Let me assist you, and I shall have something to do in my holiday-time." He was so anxious to be of use that he interrupted her before she could thank him. "Let us take alternate years," he suggested. "Did you not tell me you were searching the newspapers published in eighteen hundred and seventy-six?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I will take the next year, you will take the year after, and so on."

"You are very kind," she answered; "but I should like to propose an improvement on your plan."

"What improvement?" he asked, rather sharply.

"If you will leave the five years from 'seventy-six to 'eighty-one entirely to me," she resumed, "and take the next five years reckoning *backward* from 'seventy-six, you will help me to better purpose. Sir Jervis expects me to look for reports of Central American explorations through the newspapers of the last forty years, and I have taken the liberty of limiting the heavy task imposed on me. When I report my progress to my employer I should like to say that I have got through ten years of the examination, instead of five. Do you see any objection to the arrangement I propose?"

He proved to be obstinate—incomprehensibly obstinate.

"Let us try my plan to begin with," he insisted. "While you are looking through 'seventy-six, let me be at work on 'seventy-seven. If you still prefer your own arrangement after that, I will follow your suggestion with pleasure. Is it agreed?"

Her acute perception—enlightened by his tone as well as by his words—detected something under the surface already.

"It isn't agreed until I understand you a little better," she quietly replied. "I fancy you have some object of your own in view."

She spoke with her usual directness of look and manner. He was evidently disconcerted. "What makes you think so?" he asked.

"My own experience of myself makes me think so," she answered. "If I had some object to gain, I should persist in carrying it out—like you."

"Does that mean, Miss Emily, that you refuse to give way?"

"No, Mr. Morris; I have made myself disagreeable, but I know when to stop. I trust you, and submit."

If he had been less deeply interested in the accomplishment of his mer-

ciful design, he might have viewed Emily's sudden submission with some distrust. As it was, his eagerness to prevent her from discovering the narrative of the murder hurried him into an act of indiscretion. He made an excuse to leave her immediately, in the fear that she might change her mind.

"I have inexcusably prolonged my visit," he said. "If I presume on your kindness in this way, how can I hope that you will receive me again? We meet to-morrow in the reading-room."

He hastened away, as if he was afraid to let her say a word in reply.

Emily reflected.

"Is there something he doesn't want me to see in the news of the year 'seventy-seven?" The one explanation which suggested itself to her mind assumed that form of expression. Her excitable temperament, always impatient of delay, urged her to discover the speediest means of setting even a momentary doubt at rest. She went to the Museum the next morning resolved to search the very volume which it had been Alban's special anxiety to prevent her from examining.

For two days they pursued their task together, seated at opposite desks. On the third day Emily was absent.

Was she ill?

She was at a library in the City, consulting the file of the *Times* for the year 1877.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. ROOK.

EMILY's first day in the City library proved to be a day wasted.

Still persuaded that there was something in the newspapers published under the date of the year 'seventy-seven which Alban was afraid to let her see, she began reading the back numbers at haphazard, without any definite idea of what she was looking for. Conscious of the error into which her own impatience had led her, she was at a loss how to retrace the false step that she had taken. But two alternatives presented themselves: either to abandon the hope of making any discovery, or to attempt to penetrate Alban's motives by means of pure guess-work, pursued in the dark.

How was the problem to be solved? This serious question troubled her all through the evening, and kept her awake when she went to bed. In despair of her capacity to remove the obstacle that stood in her way, she decided on resuming her regular work at the Museum, turned her pillow to get at the cool side of it, and made up her mind to go to sleep.

In the case of the wiser animals, the Person submits to Sleep. It is only the superior human being who tries the hopeless experiment of making Sleep submit to the Person. Wakeful on the warm side of the pillow, Emily remained wakeful on the cool side, thinking again and again of the interview with Alban which had ended so strangely.

Little by little her mind passed the limits which had restrained it thus far. Alban's conduct in keeping his secret, in the matter of the newspapers, now began to associate itself with Alban's conduct in keeping that other secret, which concealed from her his suspicions of Mrs. Rook.

She started up in her bed as the next possibility occurred to her.

In speaking of the disaster which had compelled the landlord and landlady to close the inn, Cecilia had alluded to an inquest held on the body of the murdered man. Emily had heard of such proceedings being reported in the newspapers. Had something appeared in the report of the inquest at Zeeland which concerned Mrs. Rook? Had Alban discovered it? And in that discovery might the motive be found of which she was in search?

Led by the new light that had fallen on her, Emily returned to the library the next morning with a definite idea of what she had to look for. Incapable of giving exact dates, Cecilia had informed her that the crime was committed "in the autumn." The month to choose, in beginning her examination, was therefore the month of August.

No discovery rewarded her. She tried September next—with the same unsatisfactory result. On Monday, the 1st of October, she met with some encouragement at last. At the top of a column appeared a telegraphic summary of all that was then known of the crime. In the number for the Wednesday following she found a full report of the proceedings at the inquest.

Passing over the preliminary remarks, Emily read the evidence with the closest attention.

The jury having viewed the body, and having visited an out-house in which the murder had been committed, the first witness called was Mr. Benjamin Rook, landlord of the Hand-in-Hand inn.

On the evening of Saturday, September 29, 1877, two gentlemen presented themselves at Mr. Rook's house, under circumstances which especially excited his attention.

The younger of the two was short, and of fair complexion. He carried a knapsack, like a gentleman on a pedestrian excursion; his manners were pleasant, and he was decidedly good-looking. His companion, older, taller, and darker—and a finer man altogether—leaned on his arm, and seemed to be exhausted. In every respect they were singularly unlike each other. The younger stranger (excepting little half-whiskers) was clean-shaved. The elder wore his whole beard. Not knowing their names, the landlord distinguished them, at the coroner's suggestion, as the fair gentleman and the dark gentleman.

It was raining when the two arrived at the inn. There were signs in the heavens of a stormy night.

On accosting the landlord, the fair gentleman volunteered the following statement.

Approaching the village, he had been startled by seeing the dark gentleman (a total stranger to him) stretched prostrate on the grass at the roadside, so far as he could judge, in a swoon. Having a flask with brandy in it, he revived the fainting man, and led him to the inn.

This statement was confirmed by a laborer who was on his way to the village at the time.

The dark gentleman endeavored to explain what had happened to him. He had, as he supposed, allowed too long a time to pass (after an early breakfast that morning) without taking food: he could only attribute the fainting fit to that cause. He was not liable to fainting fits. What pur-

pose (if any) had brought him into the neighborhood of Zeeland he did not state. He had no intention of remaining at the inn, except for refreshment; and he asked for a carriage to take him to the railway station.

The fair gentleman, seeing the signs of bad weather, desired to remain in Mr. Rook's house for the night, and proposed to resume his walking tour the next day.

Excepting the case of supper, which could be easily provided, the landlord had no choice but to disappoint both his guests. In his small way of business, none of his customers wanted to hire a carriage—even if he could have afforded to keep one. As for beds, the few rooms which the inn contained were all engaged, including even the room occupied by himself and his wife. An exhibition of agricultural implements had been opened in the neighborhood only two days since, and a public competition between rival machines was to take place on the coming Monday. Not only was the Hand-in-Hand inn crowded, but even the accommodation offered by the nearest town had proved barely sufficient to meet the public demand.

The gentlemen looked at each other, and agreed that there was no help for it but to hurry the supper and walk to the railway station—a distance of between five and six miles—in time to catch the last train.

While the meal was being prepared, the rain held off for a while. The dark man asked his way to the post-office, and went out by himself.

He came back in about ten minutes, and sat down afterward to supper with his companion. Neither the landlord nor any other person in the public room noticed any change in him on his return. He was a grave, quiet sort of person, and (unlike the other one) not much of a talker.

As the darkness came on, the rain fell again heavily, and the heavens were black.

A flash of lightning startled the gentlemen when they went to the window to look out; the thunder-storm began. It was simply impossible that two strangers to the neighborhood could find their way to the station, through storm and darkness, in time to catch the train. With or without bedrooms, they must remain at the inn for the night.

Having already given up their own room to their lodgers, the landlord and landlady had no other place to sleep in than the kitchen. Next to the kitchen, and communicating with it by a door, was an out-house, used partly as a scullery, partly as a lumber-room. There was an old truckle-bed among the lumber, on which one of the gentlemen might rest. A mattress on the floor could be provided for the other. After adding a table and a basin for the purposes of the toilet, the accommodation which Mr. Rook was able to offer came to an end.

The travellers agreed to occupy this make-shift bed-chamber.

It was then between nine and ten o'clock. The thunder-storm had passed away, but the rain continued to fall heavily. Soon after eleven the guests at the inn retired for the night. There was some little discussion between the two travellers as to which of them should take possession of the truckle-bed. It was put an end to by the fair gentleman, in his own pleasant way. He proposed to "toss up for it," and he lost. The dark gentleman went into the room first, the other following him after waiting awhile.

Having previously barred the second door of the out-house, which led

into the yard, Mr. Rook fastened the other door, the lock and bolts of which were on the side of the kitchen. He then secured the house door, and the shutters over the lower windows. Returning to the kitchen, he noticed that the time was ten minutes short of midnight. Soon afterward he and his wife went to bed.

Nothing happened to disturb Mr. Rook during the night.

At a quarter to seven the next morning he got up, his wife being still asleep. He had been instructed to wake the gentlemen early, and he knocked at their door. Receiving no answer, after repeatedly knocking, he opened the door and stepped into the out-house.

At this point in his evidence the witness's recollections appeared to overpower him. "Give me a moment, gentlemen," he said to the jury. "I have had a dreadful fright, and I don't believe I shall get over it for the rest of my life."

The coroner helped him by a question: "What did you see when you opened the door?"

Mr. Rook answered: "I saw the dark man stretched out on his bed—dead, with a frightful wound in his throat. I saw an open razor, stained with smears of blood, at his side."

"Did you notice the door leading into the yard?"

"It was wide open, sir. When I was able to look round me, the other traveller—I mean the man with the fair complexion, who carried the knapsack—was nowhere to be seen."

"What did you do, after making these discoveries?"

"I closed the yard door. Then I locked the other door, and put the key in my pocket. After that I roused the servant, and sent him to the constable—who lived near to us—while I ran for the doctor, whose house was at the other end of our village. The doctor sent his groom, on horseback, to the police office in the town. When I returned to the inn the constable was there, and he and the police took the matter into their own hands."

"You have nothing more to tell us?"

"Nothing more."

CHAPTER XXV.

"J. B."

MR. ROOK having completed his evidence, the police authorities were the next witnesses examined.

They had not found the slightest trace of any attempt to break into the house in the night. The murdered man's gold watch and chain were discovered under his pillow. On examining his clothes the money was found in his purse, and the gold studs and sleeve-buttons were left in his shirt. But his pocket-book (seen by witnesses who had not yet been examined) was missing. The search for visiting-cards and letters had proved to be fruitless. Only the initials "J. B." were marked on his linen. He had brought no luggage with him to the inn. Nothing could be found which led to the discovery of his name or of the purpose which had taken him into that part of the country.

The police examined the out-house next. The result of this proceeding was to strengthen the circumstantial evidence against the missing man.

He must have carried away his knapsack when he took to flight; but he had been probably in too great a hurry to look for his razor case. It had fallen between the table and the wall. Of the two compartments which it contained, one had a razor in it, and one was empty. The blood-stained razor exactly fitted the second compartment, and the name of the Belgian city, "Liege," was engraved on both razors alike. After hearing the description of the suspected person, given by the landlord, the landlady, and the servant, and after seeing the beard and mustache of many years' growth on the face of the corpse, it was impossible to doubt that the razors belonged to the person who had appeared at the inn with the knapsack.

The yard was the next place inspected. Footsteps were found on the muddy earth, up to the wall. But the road on the other side had been recently mended with stones, and the trace of the fugitive was lost. Casts had been taken of the footsteps; and no other means of discovery had been left untried. The authorities in London had also been communicated with by telegraph.

The doctor being called, described a personal peculiarity, which he had noticed at the post-mortem examination, and which might lead to the identification of the murdered man.

As to the cause of death, the witness said it could be stated in two words. The internal jugular vein had been cut through, with such violence, judging by the appearances, that the wound could not have been inflicted, in the act of suicide, by the hand of the deceased person. No other injuries, and no sign of disease, were found on the body. The one cause of death had been hemorrhage; and the one peculiarity which called for notice had been discovered in the mouth. Two of the front teeth in the upper jaw were false. They had been so admirably made to resemble the natural teeth on either side of them, in form and color, that the witness had only hit on the discovery by accidentally touching the inner side of the gum with one of his fingers.

The landlady was examined when the doctor had retired. Mrs. Rook was able, in answering questions put to her, to give important information in reference to the missing pocket-book.

Before retiring to rest, the two gentlemen had paid the bill—intending to leave the inn the first thing in the morning. The traveller with the knapsack paid his share in money. The other unfortunate gentleman looked into his purse, and found only a shilling and a sixpence in it. He asked Mrs. Rook if she could change a banknote. She told him it could be done, provided the note was for no considerable sum of money. Upon that he opened his pocket-book (which the witness described minutely), and turned out the contents on the table. After searching among many Bank of England notes, some in one pocket of the book and some in another, he found a note of the value of five pounds. He thereupon settled his bill, and received the change from Mrs. Rook—her husband being in another part of the room attending to the guests. She noticed a letter in an envelope, and a paper with writing on it, and a few cards, which looked like visiting-cards, among the bank-notes which he had turned out on the table. When she returned to him with the change, he had just put them back and was closing the pocket-book. She saw him place it in one of the breast pockets of his coat.

The fellow-traveller who had accompanied him to the inn was present all the time, sitting on the opposite side of the table. He made a remark when he saw the notes produced. He said, "Put all that money back; don't tempt a poor man like me." It was said laughing, as if by way of a joke.

Mrs. Rook had observed nothing more that night, had slept as soundly as usual, and had been awakened when her husband knocked at the out-house door, according to instructions received from the gentlemen overnight.

Three of the guests in the public room corroborated Mrs. Rook's evidence. They were respectable persons, well and widely known in that part of Hampshire. Besides these, there were two strangers staying in the house. They referred the coroner to their employers, eminent manufacturers at Sheffield and Wolverhampton, whose testimony spoke for itself.

The last witness called was a grocer in the village, who kept the post-office.

On the evening of the 29th a dark gentleman, wearing his beard, came into the shop, and asked for a letter addressed to "J. B., Post-office, Zeeland." The letter had arrived by that morning's post, and it was at once handed to the applicant. He stepped a little nearer to the light of the lamp at the inner end of the counter, and opened his letter and read it. It must have been short, for the reading was done in a moment. He seemed to think over it for a while, and then he turned round toward the shop door to go out. There was nothing to notice in his look or in his manner. The witness offered a remark on the weather, and the gentleman said, "Yes, it looks like a bad night," and so went out.

The postmaster's evidence was of importance in one respect: it suggested the motive which had brought the deceased to Zeeland. The letter addressed to "J. B." was, in all probability, the letter seen by Mrs. Rook among the contents of the pocket-book spread out on the table.

The inquiry being, so far, at an end, the inquest was adjourned—on the chance of obtaining additional evidence when the reported proceedings were read by the public.

Consulting the next day's number of the newspaper, Emily discovered that the deceased person had been identified by a witness from London.

Henry Forth, gentleman's valet, being examined, made the following statement:

He had read the medical evidence contained in the report of the inquest, and believing that he could identify the deceased, had been sent by his present master to assist the object of the inquiry. Ten days since, being then out of place, he had answered an advertisement. The next day he was instructed to call at Tracey's Hotel, London, at six o'clock in the evening, and to ask for Mr. James Brown. Arriving at the hotel, he saw the gentleman for a few minutes only. Mr. Brown had a friend with him. After glancing over the valet's references, he said: "I haven't time enough to speak to you this evening. Call here to-morrow morning at nine o'clock." The gentleman who was present laughed, and said, "You won't be up." Mr. Brown answered, "That won't matter; the man can come to my bedroom, and let me see how he understands his duties, on trial." At

nine the next morning Mr. Brown was reported to be still in bed; and the witness was informed of the number of the room. He knocked at the door. A drowsy voice inside said something, which he interpreted as meaning "Come in." He went in. The toilet-table was on his left hand, and the bed (with the lower curtain drawn) was on his right. He saw on the table a tumbler with a little water in it, and with two false teeth in the water. Mr. Brown started up in the bed, looked at him furiously, abused him for daring to enter the room, and shouted to him to "get out." The witness, not accustomed to be treated in that way, felt naturally indignant, and at once withdrew, but not before he had plainly seen the vacant place which the false teeth had been made to fill. Perhaps Mr. Brown had forgotten that he had left his teeth on the table. Or perhaps he (the valet) had misunderstood what had been said to him when he knocked at the door. Either way, it seemed to be plain enough that the gentleman resented the discovery of his false teeth by a stranger.

Having concluded his statement, the witness proceeded to identify the remains of the deceased.

He at once recognized the gentleman, named James Brown, whom he had twice seen—once in the evening, and again the next morning—at Tracey's Hotel. In answer to further inquiries, he declared that he knew nothing of the family or of the place of residence of the deceased. He complained to the proprietor of the hotel of the rude treatment that he had received, and asked if Mr. Tracey knew anything of Mr. James Brown. Mr. Tracey knew nothing of him. On consulting the hotel book, it was found that he had given notice to leave that afternoon.

Before returning to London the witness produced references which gave him an excellent character. He also left the address of the master who had engaged him three days since.

The last precaution adopted was to have the face of the corpse photographed before the coffin was closed. On the same day the jury agreed on their verdict, which was: "Willful murder against some person or persons unknown."

Two days later Emily found a last allusion to the crime—extracted from the columns of the *South Hampshire Gazette*.

A relative of the deceased, seeing the report of the adjourned inquest, had appeared (accompanied by a medical gentleman), had seen the photograph, and had declared the identification by Henry Forth to be correct.

Among other particulars, now communicated for the first time, it was stated that the late Mr. James Brown had been unreasonably sensitive on the subject of his false teeth, and that the one member of his family who knew of his wearing them was the relative who now claimed his remains.

The claim having been established to the satisfaction of the authorities, the corpse was removed by railroad the same day. No further light had been thrown on the murder. The handbill offering the reward, and describing the suspected man, had failed to prove of any assistance to the investigations of the police.

From that date, no further notice of the crime committed at the Hand-in-Hand inn appeared in the public journals.

Emily closed the volume which she had been consulting, and thankfully acknowledged the services of the librarian.

The new reader had excited this gentleman's interest. Noticing how carefully she examined the numbers of the old newspaper, he looked at her from time to time, wondering whether it was good news or bad of which she was in search. She read steadily and continuously; but she never rewarded his curiosity by any outward sign of the impression that had been produced on her. When she left the room there was nothing to remark in her manner; she looked quietly thoughtful, and that was all.

The librarian smiled—amused by his own folly. Because a stranger's appearance had attracted him, he had taken it for granted that circumstances of romantic interest must be connected with her visit to the library. Far from misleading him, as he supposed, his fancy might have been employed to better purpose if it had taken a higher flight, and had associated Emily with the fateful gloom of tragedy, in place of the brighter interest of romance.

There, among the ordinary readers of the day, was a dutiful and affectionate daughter following the dreadful story of the death of her father by murder, and believing it to be the story of a stranger — because she loved and trusted the person whose short-sighted mercy had deceived her. That very discovery, the dread of which had shaken the good doctor's firm nerves, had forced Alban to exclude from his confidence the woman whom he loved, and had driven the faithful old servant from the bedside of her dying mistress—that very discovery Emily had now made, with a face which never changed color, and a heart which beat at ease. Was the deception that had won this cruel victory over truth destined still to triumph in the days which were to come? Yes—if the life of earth is a foretaste of the life of hell. No—if a lie *is* a lie, be the merciful motive for the falsehood what it may. No—if all deceit contains in it the seed of retribution, to be ripened inexorably in the lapse of time.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MOTHER EVE.

THE servant received Emily, on her return to the cottage, with a sly smile. "Here he is again, miss, waiting to see you."

She opened the parlor door, and revealed Alban Morris, as restless as ever, walking up and down the room.

"When I missed you at the Museum, I was afraid you might be ill," he said. "Ought I to have gone away when my anxiety was relieved? Shall I go away now?"

"You must take a chair, Mr. Morris, and hear what I have to say for myself. When you left me after your last visit, I suppose I felt the force of example. At any rate, I, like you, had my suspicions. I have been trying to confirm them—and I have failed."

He paused, with the chair in his hand. "Suspicious of me?" he asked.

"Certainly. Can you guess how I have been employed for the last two days? No; not even your ingenuity can do that. I have been hard at work, in another reading-room, consulting the same back numbers of the

same newspaper which you have been examining at the British Museum. There is my confession; and now we will have some tea."

She moved to the fire-place to ring the bell, and failed to see the effect produced on Alban by those lightly uttered words. The common phrase is the only phrase that can describe it. He was thunder-struck.

"Yes," she resumed, "I have read the report of the inquest. If I know nothing else, I know that the murder at the inn can't be the discovery which you are bent on keeping from me. Don't be alarmed for the preservation of your secret. I am too much discouraged to try again."

The servant interrupted them by answering the bell. Alban once more escaped detection. Emily gave her orders with an approach to the old gaiety of her school-days. "Tea, as soon as possible; and let us have the new cake. Are you too much of a man, Mr. Morris, to like cake?"

In his state of agitation he was unreasonably irritated by that playful question. "There is one thing I like better than cake," he said; "and that one thing is a plain explanation."

His tone puzzled her. "Have I said anything to offend you?" she asked. "Surely you can make allowance for a girl's curiosity? Oh, you shall have your explanation; and, what is more, you shall have it without reserve."

She was as good as her word. What she had thought, and what she had planned, when he left her after his last visit, was frankly and fully told. "If you wonder how I discovered the library," she went on, "I must refer you to my aunt's lawyer. He lives in the City, and I wrote to him to help me. I don't consider that my time has been wasted. Mr. Morris, we owe an apology to Mrs. Rook."

Alban's astonishment, when he heard this, forced its way to expression in words. "What can you possibly mean?" he asked.

The tea was brought in before Emily could reply. She filled the cups, and sighed as she looked at the cake. "If Cecilia was here, how she would enjoy it!" With that complimentary tribute to her friend, she handed a slice to Alban. He never even noticed it.

"We have both of us behaved most unkindly to Mrs. Rook," she resumed. "I can excuse your not seeing it; for I should not have seen it either, but for the newspaper. While I was reading, I had an opportunity of thinking over what we said and did, when the poor woman's behavior so needlessly offended us. I was too excited to think, at the time—and, besides, I had been upset, only the night before, by what Miss Jethro said to me."

Alban started. He remembered Miss Jethro as the teacher who had suddenly left the school, under mysterious circumstances. "What has she to do with it?" he asked.

"Nothing at all," Emily answered. "She spoke to me of her own private affairs. A long story, and you wouldn't be interested in it. Let me finish what I had to say. Mrs. Rook was naturally reminded of the murder when she heard that my name was Brown; and she must certainly have been struck, as I was, by the coincidence of my father's death taking place at the same time when his unfortunate namesake was killed. Doesn't this sufficiently account for her agitation when she looked at the locket? We first took her by surprise, and then we suspected her of Heaven knows

what, because the poor creature didn't happen to have her wits about her, and to remember at the right moment what a very common name 'Brown' is. Don't you see it as I do?"

"I see that you have arrived at a remarkable change of opinion since we spoke of the subject in the garden at school."

"In my place you would have changed your opinion too. I shall write to Mrs. Rook by to-morrow's post."

Alban heard her with dismay. "Pray be guided by my advice!" he said, earnestly. "Pray don't write that letter!"

"Why not?"

It was too late to recall the words which he had rashly allowed to escape him. How could he reply?

To own that he had not only read what Emily had read, but had carefully copied the whole narrative, and considered it at his leisure, was simply impossible after what he had now heard. Her innocent defense of Sir Jervis's housekeeper (ignoring former conclusions at which she had herself arrived) had actually relieved him of the last doubt left in his mind. Reading of the removal of the remains of the murdered man by a "relative," he had asked himself why that "relative" had not been named. And he had concluded that some private and pressing reason for concealment had been urged, which the coroner and the reporters received with sympathy and submission. He was now able to trace back the concealment to the "relative" whose name had been suppressed, and whose object had evidently been to prevent Emily from discovering the terrible circumstances under which her father had met with his death. Her peace of mind depended absolutely on Alban's discretion. Silence was a mercy, and silence was a lie; and he—a stranger—had no choice left but to feel the family compassion, and to become an accomplice in the family fraud.

In the mean while Emily reminded him that he had not yet answered her.

"Isn't the imprudence of writing to such a person plain enough to speak for itself?" he suggested, cautiously.

"Not to me."

She made that reply rather obstinately. Alban seemed (in her view) to be trying to prevent her from atoning for an act of injustice. Besides, he despised her cake. "I want to know why you object," she said, taking back the neglected slice, and eating it herself.

"I object," Alban answered, "because Mrs. Rook is a coarse, presuming woman. She may pervert your letter to some use of her own, which you may have reason to regret."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"It may be enough for *you*. When I have done a person an injury, and wish to make an apology, I don't think it necessary to inquire whether the person's manners happen to be vulgar or not."

Alban's patience was still equal to any demands that she could make on it. "I can only offer you advice which is honestly intended for your own good," he gently replied.

"You would have more influence over me, Mr. Morris, if you were a little readier to take me into your confidence. I dare say I am wrong, but I don't like following advice which is given to me in the dark."

It was impossible to offend him. "Very naturally," he said; "I don't blame you."

Her color deepened, and her voice rose. Alban's patient adherence to his own view—so courteously and considerably urged!—was beginning to try her temper. "In plain words," she rejoined, "I am to believe that you can't be mistaken in your judgment of another person."

There was a ring at the door of the cottage while she was speaking. But she was too warmly interested in confuting Alban to notice it.

He was quite willing to be confuted. Even when she lost her temper, she was still interesting to him. "I don't expect you to think me infallible," he said. "Perhaps you will remember that I have had some experience. I am unfortunately older than you are."

"Oh, if wisdom comes with age," she smartly reminded him, "your friend Miss Redwood is old enough to be your mother—and she suspected Mrs. Rook of murder because the poor woman looked at a door, and disliked being in the next room to a fidgety old maid."

Alban's manner changed: he shrank from that chance allusion to doubts and fears which he dare not acknowledge. "Let us talk of something else," he said.

She looked at him with a saucy smile. "Have I driven you into a corner at last? And is *that* your way of getting out of it?"

Even his endurance failed. "Are you trying to provoke me?" he asked. "Are you no better than other women? I wouldn't have believed it of you, Emily."

"Emily?" She repeated the name in a tone of surprise, which reminded him that he had addressed her with familiarity at a most inappropriate time—the time when they were on the point of a quarrel. He felt the implied reproach too keenly to be able to answer her with composure.

"I think of Emily—I love Emily—my one hope is that Emily may love me. Oh, my dear, is there no excuse if I forget to call you 'Miss' when you distress me?"

All that was tender and true in her nature secretly took his part. She would have followed that better impulse, if he had only been calm enough to understand her momentary silence, and to give her time. But the temper of a gentle and generous man, once roused, is slow to subside. Alban abruptly left his chair. "I had better go," he said.

"As you please," she answered. "Whether you go, Mr. Morris, or whether you stay, I shall write to Mrs. Rook."

The ring at the bell was followed by the appearance of a visitor. Dr. Allday opened the door just in time to hear Emily's last words. Her vehemence seemed to amuse him.

"Who is Mrs. Rook?" he asked.

"A most respectable person," Emily answered, indignantly; "house-keeper to Sir Jervis Redwood. You needn't sneer at her, Dr. Allday. She has not always been in service—she was landlady of the inn at Zeeland."

The doctor, about to put his hat on a chair, paused. The inn at Zeeland reminded him of the handbill, and of the visit of Miss Jethro.

"Why are you so hot over it?" he inquired.

"Because I detest prejudice." With this assertion of liberal feeling she pointed to Alban, standing quietly apart at the further end of the room.

"There is the most prejudiced man living—he hates Mrs. Rook. Would you like to be introduced to him? You're a philosopher; you may do him some good. Dr. Allday—Mr. Alban Morris."

The doctor recognized the man with the felt hat and the objectionable beard, whose personal appearance had not impressed him favorably.

Although they may hesitate to acknowledge it, there are respectable Englishmen still left who regard a felt hat and a beard as symbols of republican disaffection to the altar and the throne. Dr. Allday's manner might have expressed this curious form of patriotic feeling, but for the associations which Emily had revived. In his present frame of mind he was outwardly courteous, because he was inwardly suspicious. Mrs. Rook had been described to him as formerly landlady of the inn at Zeeland. Were there reasons for Mr. Morris's hostile feeling toward this woman, which might be referable to the crime committed in her house, and which might threaten Emily's tranquillity if they were made known? It would not be amiss to see a little more of Mr. Morris on the first convenient occasion.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir."

"You are very kind, Dr. Allday."

The exchange of polite conventionalities having been accomplished, Alban approached Emily to take his leave, with mingled feelings of regret and anxiety—regret for having allowed himself to speak harshly, anxiety to part with her in kindness.

"Will you forgive me for differing from you?" It was all he could venture to say in the presence of a stranger.

"Oh yes," she said, quietly.

"Will you think again, before you decide?"

"Certainly, Mr. Morris. But it won't alter my opinion, if I do."

The doctor, hearing what passed between them, frowned. On what subject had they been differing? And what opinion did Emily decline to alter?

Alban gave it up. He took her hand gently. "Shall I see you at the Museum to-morrow?" he asked.

She was politely indifferent to the last. "Yes—unless something happens to keep me at home."

The doctor's eyebrows still expressed disapproval. For what object was the meeting proposed? And why at a museum?

"Good-afternoon, Dr. Allday."

"Good-afternoon, sir."

For a moment after Alban's departure the doctor stood irresolute. Arriving suddenly at a decision, he snatched up his hat and turned to Emily in a hurry.

"I bring you news, my dear, which will surprise you. Who do you think has just left my house? Mrs. Ellmother! Don't interrupt me. She has made up her mind to go out to service again—tired of leading an idle life—that's her own account of it—and asks me to act as her reference."

"Did you consent?"

"Consent! If I act as her reference, I shall be asked how she came to leave her last place. A nice dilemma! Either I must own that she deserted her mistress on her death-bed, or tell a lie. When I put it to her

in that way, she walked out of the house in dead silence. If she applies to you next, receive her as I did, or decline to see her, which would be better still."

"Why am I to decline to see her?"

"In consequence of her behavior to your aunt, to be sure. Now I have said all I wanted to say, and I have no time to spare for answering idle questions. Good-by."

Socially speaking, doctors try the patience of their nearest and dearest friends in this respect—they are almost always in a hurry. Dr. Allday's precipitate departure did not tend to soothe Emily's irritated nerves. She began to find excuses for Mrs. Ellmother in a spirit of pure contradiction. The old servant's behavior might admit of justification; a friendly welcome might persuade her to explain herself. "If she applies to me," Emily determined, "I shall certainly receive her."

Having arrived at this resolution, her mind reverted to Alban.

Some of the sharp things she had said to him, subjected to after-reflection in solitude, failed to justify themselves. Her better sense began to reproach her. She tried to silence that unwelcome monitor by laying the blame on Alban. Why had he been so patient and so good? What harm was there in his calling her "Emily"? If he had told her to call *him* by his Christian name, she might have done it. How noble he looked when he got up to go away; he was actually handsome. Women may say what they please and write what they please: their natural instinct is to find their master in a man—especially when they like him. Sinking lower and lower in her own estimation, Emily tried to turn the current of her thoughts in another direction. She took up a book, opened it, looked into it, threw it across the room.

If Alban had returned at that moment, resolved on a reconciliation—if he had said, "My dear, I want to see you like yourself again; will you give me a kiss, and make it up?"—would he have left her crying when he went away? She was crying now.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MENTOR AND TELEMACHUS.

IF Emily's eyes could have followed Alban as her thoughts were following him, she would have seen him stop before he reached the end of the road in which the cottage stood. His heart was full of tenderness and sorrow; the longing to return to her was more than he could resist. It would be easy to wait, within view of the gate, until the doctor's visit came to an end. He had just decided to go back and keep watch, when he heard rapid footsteps approaching. There (devil take him!) was the doctor himself.

"I have something to say to you, Mr. Morris. Which way are you walking?"

"Any way," Alban answered, not very graciously.

"Then let us take the turning that leads to my house. It's not customary for strangers, especially when they happen to be Englishmen, to place confidence in each other. Let me set the example of violating that rule. . . to speak to you about Miss Emily. May I take your arm? Thank

you. At my age girls in general, unless they are my patients, are not objects of interest to me. But that girl at the cottage—I dare say I am in my dotage—I tell you, sir, she has bewitched me. Upon my soul, I could hardly be more anxious about her if I was her father. And, mind, I am not an affectionate man by nature. Are you anxious about her too?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"In what way are you anxious, Dr. Allday?"

The doctor smiled grimly. "You don't trust me? Well, I have promised to set the example. Keep your mask on, sir; mine is off, come what may of it. But observe: if you repeat what I am going to say—"

Alban would hear no more. "Whatever you may say, Dr. Allday, is trusted to my honor. If you doubt my honor, be so good as to let go of my arm, I am not walking your way."

The doctor's hand tightened its grasp. "That little flourish of temper, my dear sir, is all I want to set me at my ease. I feel I have got hold of the right man. Now answer me this. Have you ever heard of a person named Miss Jethro?"

Alban suddenly came to a stand-still.

"All right!" said the doctor. "I couldn't have wished for a more satisfactory reply."

"Wait a minute," Alban said. "I know Miss Jethro as a teacher at Miss Ladd's school, who left her situation suddenly, and I know no more."

The doctor's peculiar smile made its appearance again.

"Speaking in the vulgar tongue," he said, "you seem to be in a hurry to wash your hands of Miss Jethro."

"I have no reason to feel any interest in her," Alban replied.

"Don't be too sure of that, my friend. I have something to tell you which may alter your opinion. That ex-teacher at the school, sir, knows how the late Mr. Brown met his death, and how his daughter has been deceived about it. Ha, Mr. Morris, your face answers for you! You are as anxious about Emily as I am: we have the same object in view; and we must take care not to get in each other's way. Here is my house. Let us go in, and make a clean breast of it on both sides."

Established in the safe seclusion of his study, the doctor still set the example of speaking without reserve. In clear and rapid narrative he placed the whole of his experience of Miss Jethro and of Emily before his guest. Alban was not a man to leave this generous proof of confidence in him without an adequate return. The two thoroughly understood one another before they had been an hour together.

Dr. Allday summed up the result.

"We only differ in opinion on one point," he said. "We both think it likely (from our experience of the women) that the suspected murderer had an accomplice. I say the guilty person is Miss Jethro. You say—Mrs. Rook."

"When you have read my copy of the report," Alban answered, "I think you will arrive at my conclusion. Mrs. Rook might have entered the out-house in which the two men slept at any time during the night while her husband was asleep. The jury believed her when she declared that she never woke till the morning. I don't."

"I am open to conviction, Mr. Morris. Now about the future. Do you mean to go on with your inquiries?"

"Even if I had no other motive than mere curiosity," Alban answered, "I think I should go on. But I have a more urgent purpose in view. All that I have done thus far has been done in Emily's interests. My object from the first has been to preserve her from any association—in the past or in the future—with the woman whom I believe to have been concerned in her father's death. As I have already told you, she is innocently doing all she can, poor thing, to put obstacles in my way."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor; "she means to write to Mrs. Rook, and you have nearly quarrelled about it. Trust me to take that matter in hand. I don't regard it as serious. But I am mortally afraid of what you are doing in Emily's interests. I wish you would give it up."

"Why?"

"Because I see a danger. Thanks to Emily's implicit trust in her aunt (which we neither of us rated at its true importance), she is as innocent of suspicion as ever. But the chances next time may be against us. How do you know to what length your curiosity may lead you? Or on what shocking discoveries you may not blunder, with the best intentions? Some unforeseen accident may open her eyes to the truth before you can prevent it. I seem to surprise you."

"You do, indeed, surprise me."

"In the old story, my dear sir, Mentor sometimes surprised Telemachus. I am Mentor, without being, I hope, quite so long-winded as that respectable philosopher. Let me put it in two words. Emily's happiness is precious to you. Take care you are not made the means of wrecking it! Will you consent to a sacrifice for her sake?"

"I will do anything for her sake."

"Will you give up your inquiries?"

"From this moment I have done with them."

"Mr. Morris, you are the best friend she has."

"The next best friend to you, doctor."

In that fond persuasion they parted, too eagerly devoted to Emily's welfare to look at the prospect before them in its least hopeful aspect. Both clever men, neither one nor the other asked himself if any human resistance has ever yet obstructed the progress of truth—when truth has once begun to force its way to the light.

For the second time Alban stopped on his way home. The longing to be reconciled with Emily was not to be resisted. He returned to the cottage only to find disappointment waiting for him. The servant reported that her young mistress had gone to bed with a bad headache.

Alban waited a day, in the hope that Emily might write to him. No letter arrived. He repeated his visit the next morning. Fortune was still against him. On this occasion Emily was engaged.

"Engaged with a visitor?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. A young lady named Miss De Sor."

Where had he heard that name before? He remembered immediately that he had heard it at the school. Miss De Sor was the unattractive new pupil, whom the girls called Francine. Alban looked at the parlor window as he left the cottage. It was of serious importance that he

should set himself right with Emily. "And mere gossip," he thought, contemptuously, "stands in my way."

If he had been less absorbed in his own interests, he might have remembered that mere gossip is not always to be despised. It has worked fatal mischief in its time.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRANCINE.

"You're surprised to see me, of course?" Saluting Emily in those terms Francine looked round the parlor with an air of satirical curiosity. "Dear me, what a little place to live in!"

"What brings you to London?" Emily inquired.

"You ought to know, my dear, without asking. Why did I try to make friends with you at school? And why have I been trying ever since? Because I hate you—I mean because I can't resist you—no! I mean because I hate myself for liking you. Oh, never mind my reasons. I insisted on going to London with Miss Ladd, when that horrid woman announced that she had an appointment with her lawyer. I said, 'I want to see Emily.' 'Emily doesn't like you.' 'I don't care whether she likes me or not; I want to see her.' That's the way we snap at each other; and that's how I always carry my point. Here I am, till my duenna finishes her business and fetches me. What a prospect for You! Have you got any cold meat in the house? I'm not a glutton like Cecilia, but I'm afraid I shall want some lunch."

"Don't talk in that way, Francine."

"Do you mean to say you're glad to see me?"

"If you were only a little less hard and bitter I should always be glad to see you."

"You darling! (excuse my impetuosity). What are you looking at? My new dress? Do you envy me?"

"No; I admire the color—that's all."

Francine rose, and shook out her dress, and showed it from every point of view. "See how it's made: Paris of course. Money, my dear; money will do anything—except making one learn one's lessons."

"Are you not getting on any better, Francine?"

"Worse, my sweet friend—worse. One of the masters, I am happy to say, has flatly refused to teach me any longer. 'Pupils without brains I am accustomed to,' he said in his broken English; 'but a pupil with no heart is beyond my endurance.' Ha! ha! the mouldy old refugee has an eye for character, though. No heart—there I am, described in two words."

"And proud of it," Emily remarked.

"Yes—proud of it. Stop! let me do myself justice. You consider tears a sign that one has some heart, don't you? I was very near crying last Sunday. A popular preacher did it; no less a person than Mr. Mirabel—you look as if you had heard of him."

"I have heard of him from Cecilia."

"Is *she* at Brighton? Then there's one fool more in a fashionable watering-place. Oh, she's in Switzerland, is she? I don't care where she is; I only care about Mr. Mirabel. We all heard he was at Brighton for his

health, and was going to preach. Didn't we cram the church! As to describing him, I give it up. He is the only little man I ever admired—hair as long as mine, and the sort of beard you see in pictures. I wish I had his fair complexion and his white hands. We were all in love with him—or with his voice, which was it?—when he began to read the commandments. I wish I could imitate him when he came to the fifth commandment. He began in his deepest bass voice: 'Honor thy father—' He stopped, and looked up to heaven as if he saw the rest of it there. He went on, with a tremendous emphasis on the next word. 'And thy mother,' he said (as if that was quite a different thing), in a tearful, fluty, quivering voice, which was a compliment to mothers in itself. We all felt it, mothers or not. But the great sensation was when he got into the pulpit. The manner in which he dropped on his knees, and hid his face in his hands, and showed his beautiful rings, was, as a young lady said behind me, simply seraphic. We understood his celebrity from that moment. I wonder whether I can remember the sermon?"

"You needn't attempt it on my account," Emily said.

"My dear, don't be obstinate. Wait till you hear him."

"I am quite content to wait."

"Ah! you're just in the right state of mind to be converted; you're in a fair way to become one of his greatest admirers. They say he is so agreeable in private life; I am dying to know him. Do I hear a ring at the bell? Is somebody else coming to see you?"

The servant brought in a card and a message. "The person will call again, miss."

Emily looked at the name written on the card. "Mrs. Ellmother!" she exclaimed.

"What an extraordinary name!" cried Francine. "Who is she?"

"My aunt's old servant."

"Does she want a situation?"

Emily looked at some lines of writing at the back of the card. Dr. All-day had rightly foreseen events. Rejected by the doctor, Mrs. Ellmother had no alternative but to ask Emily to help her.

"If she is out of place," Francine went on, "she may be just the sort of person I am looking for."

"You?" Emily asked, in astonishment.

Francine refused to explain until she got an answer to her question. "Tell me first," she said, "is Mrs. Ellmother engaged?"

"No; she wants an engagement, and she asks me to be her reference."

"Is she sober, honest, middle-aged, clean, steady, good-tempered, industrious?" Francine rattled on. "Has she all the virtues, and none of the vices? Is she not too good-looking, and has she no male followers? In one terrible word, will she satisfy Miss Ladd?"

"What has Miss Ladd to do with it?"

"How stupid you are, Emily! Do put the woman's card down on the table, and listen to me. Haven't I told you that one of my masters has declined to have anything more to do with me? Doesn't that help you to understand how I get on with the rest of them? I am no longer Miss Ladd's pupil, my dear. Thanks to my laziness and my temper, I am to be raised to the dignity of 'a parlor boarder.' In other words, I am to be

a young lady who patronizes the school, with a room of my own and a servant of my own. All provided for by a private arrangement between my father and Miss Ladd before I left the West Indies. My mother was at the bottom of it, I have not the least doubt. You don't appear to understand me."

"I don't indeed!"

Francine considered a little. "Perhaps they were fond of you at home," she suggested.

"Say they loved me, Francine—and I loved them."

"Ah, my position is just the reverse of yours. Now they have got rid of me, they don't want me back again at home. I know as well what my mother said to my father as if I had heard her. 'Francine will never get on at school at her age. Try her, by all means; but make some other arrangement with Miss Ladd in case of a failure, or she will be returned on our hands like a bad shilling.' There is my mother, my anxious, affectionate mother, hit off to a T."

"She is your mother, Francine."

"Oh no, I won't forget it. My cat is my kitten's mother. There, there, I won't shock your sensibilities. Let us get back to matter of fact. When I begin my new life Miss Ladd makes one condition. My maid is to be a model of discretion—an elderly woman, not a skittish young person who will only encourage me. I must submit to the elderly woman, or I shall be sent back to the West Indies after all. How long did Mrs. Ellmother live with your aunt?"

"Twenty-five years, and more."

"Good heavens! it's a lifetime. Why isn't this amazing creature living with you, now that your aunt is dead? Did you send her away?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why did she go?"

"I don't know."

"Do you mean that she went away without a word of explanation?"

"Yes, that is exactly what I mean."

"When did she go? As soon as your aunt was dead?"

"That doesn't matter, Francine."

"In plain English, you won't tell me? I am all on fire with curiosity—and that is how you put me out!"

She seated herself by Emily on the sofa, and put her arm in an outburst of affection round Emily's waist. "My dear, if you have the slightest regard for me, let us have the woman in here when she comes back for her answer. Somebody must satisfy me. I mean to make Mrs. Ellmother explain herself."

"I don't think you will succeed, Francine."

"Wait a little, and you will see. By-the-bye, it is understood that my new position at the school gives me the privilege of accepting invitations. Do you know any nice people to whom you can introduce me?"

"I am the last person in the world who has a chance of helping you," Emily answered. "Excepting good Dr. Allday—" On the point of adding the name of Alban Morris, she checked herself without knowing why, and substituted the name of her school friend. "—and not forgetting Cecilia," she resumed, "I know nobody."

"Cecilia's a fool," Francine remarked, gravely; "but now I think of it, she may be worth cultivating. Her father is a Member of Parliament—and didn't I hear that he has a fine place in the country? You see, Emily, I may expect to be married (with my money), if I can only get into good society. (Don't suppose I am dependent on my father; my marriage portion is provided for in my uncle's will.) Cecilia may really be of some use to me. Why shouldn't I make a friend of her, and get introduced to her father—in the autumn, you know, when the house is full of company? Have you any idea when she is coming back?"

"No."

"Do you think of writing to her?"

"Of course."

"Give her my kind love, and say I hope she enjoys Switzerland."

"Francine, you are positively shameless! After calling my dearest friend a fool and a glutton, you send her your love for your own selfish ends, and you expect me to help you in deceiving her. I won't do it."

"Keep your temper, my child. We are all selfish, you little goose. The only difference is, some of us own it, and some of us don't. I shall find my own way to Cecilia's good graces quite easily: the way is through her mouth. You mentioned a certain Dr. Allday. Does he give parties? And do the right sort of men go to them? Hush! I think I hear the bell again. Go to the door, and see who it is."

Emily waited, without taking any notice of this suggestion. The servant announced that "the person had called again to know if there was any answer."

"Show her in here," Emily said.

The servant withdrew, and came back again.

"The person doesn't wish to intrude, miss; it will be quite sufficient if you will send a message by me."

Emily crossed the room to the door.

"Come in, Mrs. Ellmother," she said. "You have been too long away already. Pray come in."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"BONY."

MRS. ELLMOTHER reluctantly entered the room.

Since Emily had seen her last, her personal appearance doubly justified the nickname by which her late mistress had distinguished her. The old servant was worn and wasted; her gown hung loose on her angular body; the big bones of her face stood out more prominently than ever. She took Emily's hand doubtfully. "I hope I see you well, miss," she said, with hardly a vestige left of her former firmness of voice and manner.

"I am afraid you have been suffering from illness," Emily answered, gently.

"It's the life I'm leading that wears me down; I want work and change."

Making that reply, she looked round, and discovered Francine observing her with undisguised curiosity. "You have got company with you," she said to Emily; "I had better go away, and come back another time."

Francine stopped her before she could open the door. "You mustn't go away; I wish to speak to you."

"About what, miss?"

The eyes of the two women met—one, near the end of her life, concealing under a rugged surface a nature sensitively affectionate and incorruptibly true; the other, young in years, without the virtues of youth, hard in manner and hard at heart. In silence on either side, they stood face to face—strangers brought together by the force of circumstances, working inexorably toward their hidden end.

Emily introduced Mrs. Ellmother to Francine. "It may be worth your while," she hinted, "to hear what this young lady has to say."

Mrs. Ellmother listened, with little appearance of interest in anything that a stranger might have to say; her eyes rested on the card which contained her written request to Emily. Francine, watching her closely, understood what was passing in her mind. It might be worth while to conciliate the old woman by a little act of attention. Turning to Emily, Francine pointed to the card lying on the table. "You have not attended yet to Mrs. Ellmother's request," she said.

Emily at once assured Mrs. Ellmother that the request was granted. "But is it wise," she asked, "to go out to service again at your age?"

"I have been used to service all my life, Miss Emily—that's one reason. And service may help me to get rid of my own thoughts—that's another. If you can find me a situation somewhere you will be doing me a good turn."

"Is it useless to suggest that you might come back and live with me?" Emily ventured to say.

Mrs. Ellmother's head sank on her breast. "Thank you kindly, miss; it is useless."

"Why is it useless?" Francine asked.

Mrs. Ellmother was silent.

"Miss De Sor is speaking to you," Emily reminded her.

"Am I to answer Miss De Sor?"

Attentively observing what passed, and placing her own construction on looks and tones, it suddenly struck Francine that Emily herself might be in Mrs. Ellmother's confidence, and that she might have reasons of her own for assuming ignorance when awkward questions were asked. For the moment, at least, Francine decided on keeping her suspicions to herself.

"I may, perhaps, offer you the employment you want," she said to Mrs. Ellmother. "I am staying at Brighton for the present with the lady who was Miss Emily's school-mistress, and I am in need of a maid. Would you be willing to consider it if I proposed to engage you?"

"Yes, miss."

"In that case you can hardly object to the customary inquiry. Why did you leave your last place?"

Mrs. Ellmother appealed to Emily. "Did you tell this young lady how long I remained in my last place?"

Melancholy remembrances had been revived in Emily by the turn which the talk had now taken. Francine's cat-like patience, stealthily feeling its way to its end, jarred on her nerves. "Yes," she said; "in justice to you I have mentioned your long term of service."

Mrs. Ellmother addressed Francine. "You know, miss, that I served

my late mistress for over twenty-five years. Will you please remember that, and let it be a reason for not asking me why I left my place?"

Francine smiled compassionately. "My good creature, you have mentioned the very reason why I *should* ask! You live five-and-twenty years with your mistress, and then suddenly leave her, and you expect me to pass over this extraordinary proceeding without inquiry. Take a little time to think."

"I want no time to think. What I had in my mind when I left Miss Letitia is something which I refuse to explain, miss, to you or to anybody."

She recovered some of her old firmness when she made that reply. Francine saw the necessity of yielding—for the time at least. Emily remained silent, oppressed by remembrance of the doubts and fears which had darkened the last miserable days of her aunt's illness. She began already to regret having made Francine and Mrs. Ellmother known to each other.

"I won't dwell on what appears to be a painful subject," Francine graciously resumed. "I meant no offense. You are not angry, I hope?"

"Sorry, miss. I might have been angry at one time. That time is over."

It was said sadly and resignedly. Emily heard the answer. Her heart ached as she looked at the old servant, and thought of the contrast between past and present. With what a hearty welcome this broken woman had been used to receive her in the by-gone holiday-time! Her eyes moistened. She felt the merciless persistency of Francine as if it had been an insult offered to herself. "Give it up," she said, sharply.

"Leave me, my dear, to manage my own business," Francine replied. "About your qualifications," she continued, turning coolly to Mrs. Ellmother. "Can you dress hair?"

"Yes."

"I ought to tell you," Francine insisted, "that I am very particular about my hair."

"My mistress was very particular about her hair," Mrs. Ellmother answered.

"Are you a good needle-woman?"

"As good as ever I was—with the help of my spectacles."

Francine turned to Emily. "See how well we get on together! We are beginning to understand each other already. I am an odd creature, Mrs. Ellmother. Sometimes I take sudden likings to persons. I have taken a liking to you. Do you begin to think a little better of me than you did? I hope you will produce the right impression on Miss Ladd; you shall have every assistance that I can give. I will beg Miss Ladd as a favor to me not to ask you that one forbidden question."

Poor Mrs. Ellmother, puzzled by the sudden appearance of Francine in the character of an eccentric young lady, the creature of genial impulse, thought it right to express her gratitude for the promised interference in her favor. "That's kind of you, miss," she said.

"No, no; only just. I ought to tell you there's one thing Miss Ladd is ~~gratified~~ ^{glad} to hear of."

"~~Is~~ ^{Yes}. Are you quite sure," Francine inquired, jocosely, "that she will ~~be~~ ^{be} herself in that particular?"

~~and~~ ^{and} its intended effect. Mrs. Ellmother,

& "Lord, miss, what will you say next!"

"My good soul, I will say something next that is more to the purpose. If Miss Ladd asks me why you have so unaccountably refused to be a servant again in this house, I shall take care to say that it is certainly not out of dislike to Miss Emily."

"You need say nothing of the sort," Emily quietly remarked.

"And still less," Francine proceeded, without noticing the interruption—"still less through any disagreeable remembrances of Miss Emily's aunt."

Mrs. Ellmother saw the trap that had been set for her. "It won't do, miss," she said.

"What won't do?"

"Trying to pump me."

Francine burst out laughing. Emily noticed an artificial ring in her gayety, which suggested that she was exasperated rather than amused by the repulse which had baffled her curiosity once more.

Mrs. Ellmother reminded the merry young lady that the proposed arrangement between them had not been concluded yet. "Am I to understand, miss, that you will keep a place open for me in your service?"

"You are to understand," Francine answered, sharply, "that I must have Miss Ladd's approval before I can engage you. Suppose you come to Brighton? I will pay your fare, of course."

"Never mind my fare, miss. Will you give up pumping?"

"Make your mind easy. It's quite useless to attempt pumping you. When will you come?"

Mrs. Ellmother pleaded for a little delay. "I'm altering my gowns," she said. "I get thinner and thinner—don't I, Miss Emily? My work won't be done before Thursday."

"Let us say Friday, then," Francine proposed.

"Friday!" Mrs. Ellmother exclaimed. "You forget that Friday is an unlucky day."

"I forgot that, certainly. How can you be so absurdly superstitious?"

"You may call it what you like, miss. I have good reason to think as I do. I was married on a Friday, and a bitter, bad marriage it turned out to be. Superstitious, indeed! You don't know what my experience has been. My only sister was one of a party of thirteen at dinner, and she died within a year. If we are to get on together nicely, I'll take that journey on Saturday, if you please."

"Anything to satisfy you," Francine agreed. "There is the address. Come in the middle of the day, and we will give you your dinner. No fear of our being thirteen in number. What will you do if you have the misfortune to spill the salt?"

"Take a pinch between my finger and thumb, and throw it over my left shoulder," Mrs. Ellmother answered, gravely. "Good-day, miss."

"Good-day."

Emily followed the departing visitor out to the hall. She had seen and heard enough to decide her on trying to break off the proposed negotiation, with the one kind purpose of protecting Mrs. Ellmother against the pitiless curiosity of Francine.

"Do you think you and that young lady are likely to get on well together?" she asked.

"I have told you already, Miss Emily, I want to get away from my

own home and my own thoughts; I don't care where I go, so long as I do that." Having answered in those words, Mrs. Ellmother opened the door, and waited awhile, thinking. "I wonder whether the dead know what is going on in the world they have left?" she said, looking at Emily. "If they do, there's one among them knows my thoughts, and feels for me. Good-by, miss, and don't think worse of me than I deserve."

Emily went back to the parlor. The only resource left was to plead with Francine for mercy to Mrs. Ellmother.

"Do you really mean to give it up?" she asked.

"To give up—what? 'Pumping,' as that obstinate old creature calls it?"

Emily persisted. "Don't worry the poor old soul. However strangely she may have left my aunt and me, her motives are kind and good; I am sure of that. Will you let her keep her harmless little secret?"

"Oh, of course!"

"I don't believe you, Francine."

"Don't you? I am like Cecilia: I am getting hungry. Shall we have some lunch?"

"You hard-hearted creature!"

"Does that mean—no luncheon until I have owned the truth? Suppose *you* own the truth. I won't tell Mrs. Ellmother that you have betrayed her."

"For the last time, Francine, I know no more about it than you do. If you persist in taking your own view, you as good as tell me I lie; and you will oblige me to leave the room."

Even Francine's obstinacy was compelled to give way, so far as appearances went. Still possessed by the delusion that Emily was deceiving her, she was now animated by a stronger motive than mere curiosity. Her sense of her own importance imperatively urged her to prove that she was not a person who could be deceived with impunity.

"I beg your pardon," she said, with humility. "But I must positively have it out with Mrs. Ellmother. She has been more than a match for me; my turn next. I mean to get the better of her, and I shall succeed."

"I have already told you, Francine—you will fail."

"My dear, I am a dunce, and I don't deny it. But let me tell you one thing. I haven't lived all my life in the West Indies, among black servants, without learning something."

"What do you mean?"

"More, my clever friend, than you are likely to guess. In the mean time don't forget the duties of hospitality. Ring the bell for luncheon."

CHAPTER XXX.

LADY DORIS.

THE arrival of Miss Ladd some time before she had been expected interrupted the two girls at a critical moment. She had hurried over her business in London, eager to pass the rest of the day with her favorite pupil. Emily's affectionate welcome was, in some degree at least, inspired by ^{the} To feel herself in the embrace of the warm-hearted
finding a refuge from Francine,

When the hour of departure arrived, Miss Ladd invited Emily to Brighton for the second time. "On the last occasion, my dear, you wrote me an excuse; I won't be treated in that way again. If you can't return with us now, come to-morrow." She added, in a whisper, "Otherwise, I shall think you include *me* in your dislike of Francine."

There was no resisting this. It was arranged that Emily should go to Brighton on the next day.

Left by herself, her thoughts might have reverted to Mrs. Ellmother's doubtful prospects, and to Francine's strange allusion to her life in the West Indies, but for the arrival of two letters by the afternoon post. The handwriting of one of them was unknown to her. She opened that one first. It was an answer to the letter of apology, which she had persisted in writing to Mrs. Rook. Happily for herself, Alban's influence had not been without its effect, after his departure. She had written kindly, but she had written briefly at the same time.

Mrs. Rook's reply presented a nicely compounded mixture of gratitude and grief. The gratitude was addressed to Emily as a matter of course. The grief related to her "excellent master." Sir Jervis's strength had suddenly failed. His medical attendant, being summoned, had expressed no surprise. "My patient is over seventy years of age," the doctor remarked. "He will sit up late at night, writing his book; and he refuses to take exercise, till headache and giddiness force him to try the fresh air. As the necessary result, he has broken down at last. It may end in paralysis, or it may end in death." Reporting this expression of medical opinion, Mrs. Rook's letter glided imperceptibly from respectful sympathy to modest regard for her own interests in the future. It might be the sad fate of her husband and herself to be thrown on the world again. If necessity brought them to London, would "kind Miss Emily grant her the honor of an interview, and favor a poor unlucky woman with a word of advice?"

"She may pervert your letter to some use of her own, which you may have reason to regret." Did Emily remember Alban's warning words? No: she accepted Mrs. Rook's reply as a gratifying tribute to the justice of her own opinions.

Having proposed to write to Alban, feeling penitently that she had been in the wrong, she was now readier than ever to send him a letter, feeling compassionately that she had been in the right. Besides, it was due to the faithful friend, who was still working for her in the reading-room, that he should be informed of Sir Jervis's illness. Whether the old man lived or whether he died, his literary labors were fatally interrupted in either case, and one of the consequences would be the termination of her employment at the Museum. Although the second of the two letters which she had received was addressed to her in Cecilia's handwriting, Emily waited to read it until she had first written to Alban. "He will come to-morrow," she thought, "and we shall both make apologies. I shall regret that I was angry with him, and he will regret that he was mistaken in his judgment of Mrs. Rook. We shall be as good friends again as ever."

In this happy frame of mind she opened Cecilia's letter. It was full of good news from first to last.

The invalid sister had made such rapid progress toward recovery that the travellers had arranged to set forth on their journey back to England

in a fortnight. "My one regret," Cecilia added, "is the parting with Lady Doris. She and her husband are going to Genoa, where they will embark in Lord Janeaway's yacht for a cruise in the Mediterranean. When we have said that miserable word good-by, oh, Emily, what a hurry I shall be in to get back to you! Those allusions to your lonely life are so dreadful, my dear, that I have destroyed your letter; it is enough to break one's heart only to look at it. When once I get to London, there shall be no more solitude for my poor afflicted friend. Papa will be free from his Parliamentary duties in August, and he has promised to have the house full of delightful people to meet you. Who do you think will be one of our guests? He is illustrious; he is fascinating; he deserves a line all to himself, thus:

"The Reverend Miles Mirabel!

"Lady Doris has discovered that the country parsonage in which this brilliant clergyman submits to exile is only twelve miles away from our house. She has written to Mr. Mirabel to introduce me, and to mention the date of my return. We will have some fun with the popular preacher—we will both fall in love with him together.

"Is there anybody to whom you would like me to send an invitation? Shall we have Mr. Alban Morris? Now I know how kindly he took care of you at the railway station, your good opinion of him is my opinion. Your letter also mentions a doctor. Is he nice? and do you think he will let me eat pastry if we have him too? I am so overflowing with hospitality (all for your sake) that I am ready to invite anybody and everybody to cheer you and make you happy again. Would you like to meet Miss Ladd and the whole school?

"As to our amusements, make your mind easy.

"I have come to a distinct understanding with papa that we are to have dances every evening—except when we try a little concert as a change. Private theatricals are to follow, when we want another change after the dancing and the music. No early rising; no fixed hour for breakfast; everything that is most exquisitely delicious at dinner, and, to crown all, your room next to mine, for delightful midnight gossipings, when we ought to be in bed. What do you say, darling, to the programme?

"A last piece of news, and I have done.

"I have actually had a proposal of marriage, from a young gentleman who sits opposite to me at the *table d'hôte*. When I tell you that he has white eyelashes, and red hands, and such enormous front teeth that he can't shut his mouth, you will not need to be told that I refused him. This vindictive person has abused me ever since in a most shameful manner. I heard him last night under my window trying to set one of his friends against me. 'Keep clear of her, my dear fellow; she's the most heartless creature living.' The friend took my part; he said, 'I don't agree with you; the young lady is a person of great sensibility.' 'Non-sense,' says my amiable lover; 'she eats too much—her sensibility is all stomach.' There's a wretch for you. What a shameful advantage to take of sitting opposite to me at dinner! Good-by, my love, till we meet soon, and are as happy together as the day is long."

Emily kissed the signature. At that moment of all others Cecilia was such a ~~refreshing~~ contrast to Francine.

Before putting the letter away, she looked again at that part of it which mentioned Lady Doris's introduction of Cecilia to Mr. Mirabel. "I don't feel the slightest interest in Mr. Mirabel," she thought, smiling, as the idea occurred to her, "and I need never have known him but for Lady Doris, who is a perfect stranger to me."

She had just placed the letter in her desk when a visitor was announced. Dr. Allday presented himself (in a hurry, as usual).

"Another patient waiting?" Emily asked, mischievously. "No time to spare again?"

"Not a moment," the old gentleman answered. "Have you heard from Mrs. Ellmother?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean to say you have answered her?"

"I have done better than that, doctor—I have seen her this morning."

"And consented to be her reference, of course?"

"How well you know me!"

Dr. Allday was a philosopher: he kept his temper. "Just what I might have expected," he said. "Eve and the apple. Only forbid a woman to do anything, and she does it directly, because you have forbidden her. I'll try the other way with you now, Miss Emily. There was something else that I meant to have forbidden."

"What was it?"

"May I make a special request?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, my dear, write to Mrs. Rook. I beg and entreat of you, write to Mrs. Rook."

Emily's playful manner suddenly disappeared. Ignoring the doctor's little outbreak of humor, she waited in grave surprise until it was his pleasure to explain himself.

Dr. Allday, on his side, ignored the ominous change in Emily: he went on as pleasantly as ever. "Mr. Morris and I have had a long talk about you, my dear. Mr. Morris is a capital fellow; I recommend him as a sweetheart. I also back him in the matter of Mrs. Rook. What's the matter now? You're as red as a rose. Temper again, eh?"

"Hatred of meanness," Emily answered, indignantly. "I despise a man who plots behind my back to get another man to help him. Oh, how I have been mistaken in Alban Morris!"

"Oh, how little you know of the best friend you have!" cried the doctor, imitating her. "Girls are all alike; the only man they can understand is the man who flatters them. Will you oblige me by writing to Mrs. Rook?"

Emily made an attempt to match the doctor with his own weapons. "Your little joke comes too late," she said, satirically. "There is Mrs. Rook's answer. Read it, and—" she checked herself: even in her anger she was incapable of speaking ungenerously to the old man who had so warmly befriended her. "I won't say to *you*," she resumed, "what I might have said to another person."

"Shall I say it for you?" asked the incorrigible doctor. "'Read it, and be ashamed of yourself;' that was what you had in your mind, isn't it? Anything to please you, my dear." He put on his spectacles, read the letter, and handed it back to Emily with an impenetrable countenance.

"What do you think of my new spectacles?" he asked, as he took the glasses off his nose. "In the experience of thirty years I have had three grateful patients." He put the spectacles back in the case. "This comes from the third. Very gratifying—very gratifying."

Emily's sense of humor was not the uppermost sense in her at that moment. She pointed with a peremptory forefinger to Mrs. Rook's letter. "Have you nothing to say about this?"

The doctor had so little to say about it that he was able to express himself in one word:

"Humbug!"

He took his hat, nodded kindly to Emily, and hurried away to feverish pulses waiting to be felt, and to furred tongues that were ashamed to show themselves.

CHAPTER XXXI

MOIRA.

WHEN Alban presented himself the next morning, the hours of the night had exercised their tranquillizing influence over Emily. She remembered, sorrowfully, how Dr. Allday had disturbed her belief in the man who loved her; no feeling of irritation remained. Alban noticed that her manner was unusually subdued: she received him with her customary grace, but not with her customary smile.

"Are you not well?" he asked.

"I am a little out of spirits," she replied. "A disappointment—that is all."

He waited a moment, apparently in the expectation that she might tell him what the disappointment was. She remained silent, and she looked away from him. Was he in any way answerable for the depression of spirits to which she alluded? The doubt occurred to him, but he said nothing.

"I suppose you have received my letter?" she resumed.

"I have come here to thank you for your letter."

"It was my duty to tell you of Sir Jervis's illness; I deserve no thanks."

"You have written to me so kindly," Alban reminded her; "you have referred to our difference of opinion, the last time I was here, so gently and so forgivingly—"

"If I had written a little later," she interposed, "the tone of my letter might have been less agreeable to you. I happened to send it to the post before I received a visit from a friend of yours—a friend who had something to say to me after consulting with you."

"Do you mean Dr. Allday?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"What you wished him to say. He did his best; he was as obstinate and unfeeling as you could possibly wish him to be; but he was too late. I have written to Mrs. Rook, and I have received a reply." She spoke sadly, not angrily, and pointed to the letter lying on her desk.

Alban understood: he looked at her in despair. "Is that wretched woman doomed to set us at variance every time we meet!" he exclaimed.

Emily silently held out the letter.

He refused to take it. "The wrong you have done me is not to be set right in that way," he said. "You believe the doctor's visit was arranged between us. I never knew that he intended to call on you; I had no interest in sending him here, and I have no wish to offer an opinion on your correspondence with Mrs. Rook."

"I don't understand you."

"You will understand me when I tell you how my conversation with Dr. Allday ended. I have done with interference; I have done with advice. Whatever my doubts may be, all further effort on my part to justify them—all further inquiries, no matter in what direction, are at an end: I make the sacrifice for your sake. No! I must repeat what you said to me just now: I deserve no thanks. What I have done has been done in deference to Dr. Allday, against my own convictions, in spite of my own fears. Ridiculous convictions! ridiculous fears! Men with morbid minds are their own tormentors. It doesn't matter how I suffer, so long as you are at ease. I shall never thwart you or vex you again. Have you a better opinion of me now?"

She made the best of all answers—she gave him her hand.

"May I kiss it?" he asked, as timidly as if he had been a boy addressing his first sweetheart.

She was half inclined to laugh and half inclined to cry. "Yes, if you like," she said, softly.

"Will you let me come and see you again?"

"Gladly—when I return to London."

"You are going away?"

"I am going to Brighton this afternoon, to stay with Miss Ladd."

It was hard to lose her on the happy day when they understood each other at last. An expression of disappointment passed over his face. He rose, and walked restlessly to the window. "Miss Ladd?" he repeated, turning to Emily as if an idea had struck him. "Did I hear at the school that Miss De Sor was to spend the holidays under the care of Miss Ladd?"

"Yea."

"The same young lady," he went on, "who paid you a visit yesterday morning?"

"The same."

That haunting distrust of the future, which he had first betrayed and then affected to ridicule, exercised its depressing influence over his better sense. He was unreasonable enough to feel doubtful of Francine simply because she was a stranger.

"Miss De Sor is a new friend of yours," he said. "Do you like her?"

It was not an easy question to answer, without entering into particulars which Emily's delicacy of feeling warned her to avoid. "I must know a little more of Miss De Sor," she said, "before I can decide."

Alban's misgivings were encouraged by this evasive reply. He began to regret having left the cottage on the previous day when he had heard that Emily was engaged. He might have sent in his card, and might have been admitted. It was an opportunity lost of observing Francine. On the one occasion when he had spoken to her—that is to say, on the morning of her first day at school, when they had accidentally met at the summer-

house—she had left a disagreeable impression on his mind. He had not thought of her since, but he remembered now that he had disliked her.

"Is any day fixed for your return to London?" he asked.

"Not yet," she said. "I hardly know how long my visit will be."

"In little more than a fortnight," he continued, "I shall return to my classes: they will be dreary classes without you. Miss De Sor goes back to the school with Miss Ladd, I suppose?"

Emily was at a loss to account for the depression in his looks and tones while he was making these unimportant inquiries. She tried to rouse him by speaking lightly in reply.

"Miss De Sor returns in quite a new character; she is to be a guest instead of a pupil. Do you wish to be better acquainted with her?"

"Yes," he said, gravely, "now I know that she is a friend of yours." He returned to his place near her. "A pleasant visit makes the days pass quickly," he resumed. "You may remain at Brighton longer than you anticipate, and we may not meet again for some time to come. If anything happens—"

"Do you mean anything serious?" she asked.

"No, no! I only mean—if I can be of any service. In that case, will you write to me?"

"You know I will!"

She looked at him anxiously. He had completely failed to hide from her the uneasy state of his mind: a man less capable of concealment of feeling never lived. "You are anxious, and out of spirits," she said, gently. "Is it my fault?"

"Your fault? Oh, don't think that! I have my dull days and my bright days, and just now my barometer is down at dull." His voice faltered in spite of his efforts to control it; he gave up the struggle, and took his hat to go. "Do you remember, Emily, what I once said to you in the garden at school? I still believe there is a time of fulfillment to come in our two lives." He suddenly checked himself, as if there had been something in his mind to which he hesitated to give expression, and held out his hand to bid her good-by.

"You said something more to me," she reminded him. "You said, 'Happen what may in the interval, I trust the future.' Do you feel the same trust still?"

He sighed, drew her to him gently, and kissed her on the forehead. Was that his only reply? Before she was calm enough to speak to him, he was gone.

On the same day Emily was at Brighton.

Francine happened to be alone in the drawing-room. Her first proceeding, when Emily was shown in, was to stop the servant.

"Have you taken my letter to the post?"

"Yes, miss."

"It doesn't matter." She dismissed the servant by a gesture, and burst into such effusive hospitality that she actually insisted on kissing Emily.

"Do you know what I have been doing?" she said. "I have been writing to Cecilia—~~directing to the care of her father at the House of Commons.~~ I stupid!—
able to give me the right address in

Switzerland. You don't object, I hope, to my making myself agreeable to our dear, beautiful, greedy girl? It is of such importance to me to surround myself with influential friends—and, of course, I have given her your love. Don't look disgusted! Come and see your room.—Oh, never mind Miss Ladd. You will see her when she wakes. Ill? Is that sort of old woman ever ill? She's only taking her nap after bathing. Bathing in the sea at her age! How she must frighten the fishes!"

Having seen her own bed-chamber, Emily was next introduced to the room occupied by Francine.

One object that she noticed in it caused her some little surprise, not unmingled with disgust. She discovered on the toilet-table a coarsely caricatured portrait of Mrs. Ellmother. It was a sketch in pencil—wretchedly drawn, but spitefully successful as a likeness. "I didn't know you were an artist," Emily remarked, with an ironical emphasis on the last word. Francine laughed scornfully, crumpled the drawing up in her hand, and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

"You satirical creature!" she burst out, gayly. "If you had lived a dull life at San Domingo, you would have taken to spoiling paper too. I might really have turned out an artist if I had been clever and industrious like you. As it was, I learned a little drawing—and got tired of it. I tried modelling in wax—and got tired of it. Who do you think was my teacher? One of our slaves."

"A slave!" Emily exclaimed.

"Yes, a mulatto, if you wish me to be particular; the daughter of an English father and a negro mother. In her young time (at least she said so herself) she was quite a beauty, in her particular style. Her master's favorite, he educated her himself. Besides drawing, and painting, and modelling in wax, she could sing and play—all the accomplishments thrown away on a slave! When her owner died, my uncle bought her at the sale of the property."

A word of natural compassion escaped Emily—to Francine's surprise.

"Oh, my dear, you needn't pity her! Sappho (that was her name) fetched a high price, even when she was no longer young. She came to us by inheritance, with the estates and the rest of it, and took a fancy to me when she found I didn't get on well with my father and mother. 'I owe it to my father and mother,' she used to say, 'that I am a slave. When I see affectionate daughters, it wrings my heart.' Sappho was a strange compound. A woman with a white side to her character, and a black side. For weeks together she would be a civilized being. Then she used to relapse, and become as complete a negress as her mother. At the risk of her life she stole away on those occasions into the interior of the island, and looked on, in hiding, at the horrid witchcrafts and idolatries of the blacks; they would have murdered a half-blood, prying into their ceremonies, if they had discovered her. I followed her once as far as I dared. The frightful yellings and drummings in the darkness of the forest frightened me. The blacks suspected her, and it came to my ears. I gave her the warning that saved her life (I don't know what I should have done without Sappho to amuse me); and from that time I do believe the curious creature loved me. You see I can speak generously even of a slave!"

"I wonder you didn't bring her with you to England," Emily said.

"In the first place," Francine answered, "she was my father's property, not mine. In the second place, she's dead. Poisoned, as the other half-bloods supposed, by some enemy among the blacks. She said herself she was under a spell."

"What did she mean?"

Francine was not interested enough in the subject to explain. "Stupid superstition, my dear. The negro side of Sappho was uppermost when she was dying—there is the explanation. Be off with you! I hear the old woman on the stairs. Meet her before she can come in here. My bedroom is my only refuge from Miss Ladd."

On the morning of the last day in the week Emily had a little talk in private with her old school-mistress. Miss Ladd listened to what she had to say of Mrs. Ellmother, and did her best to relieve Emily's anxiety. "I think you are mistaken, my child, in supposing that Francine is in earnest. Her great fault is that she is hardly ever in earnest. You can trust to my discretion; leave the rest to your aunt's old servant and to me."

Mrs. Ellmother arrived punctual to the appointed time. She was shown into Miss Ladd's own room. Francine—ostentatiously resolved to take no personal part in the affair—went out for a walk. Emily waited to hear the result.

After a long interval Miss Ladd returned to the drawing-room, and announced that she had sanctioned the engagement by Francine of Mrs. Ellmother.

"I have considered your wishes in this respect," she said. "It is arranged that a week's notice on either side shall end the term of service after the first month. I can not feel justified in doing more than that. Mrs. Ellmother is such a respectable woman, she is so well known to you, and she was so long in your aunt's service, that I am bound to consider the importance of securing a person who is exactly fitted to attend on such a girl as Francine. In one word, I can trust Mrs. Ellmother."

"When does she enter on her service?" Emily inquired.

"On the day after we return to the school," Miss Ladd replied. "You will be glad to see her, I am sure. I will send her here."

"One word more before you go," Emily said. "Did you ask her why she left my aunt?"

"My dear child, a woman who has been five-and-twenty years in one place is entitled to keep her own secrets. I understand that she had her reasons, and that she doesn't think it necessary to mention them to anybody. Never trust people by halves—especially when they are people like Mrs. Ellmother."

It was too late now to raise any objections. Emily could only hope that Francine's curiosity would wear itself out with the lapse of time. It was a relief, rather than a disappointment, to discover that Mrs. Ellmother was in a hurry to get back to London by the next train. She had found an opportunity of letting her lodgings, and she was eager to conclude the bargain. "You see I couldn't say Yes," she explained, "till I knew whether I was to get this new place or not—and the person wants to go in to-night."

Emily stopped her at the door. "Promise to write, and tell me how you get on with Miss De Sor."

"You say that, Miss Emily, as if you didn't feel hopeful about me."

"I say it because I feel interested about you. Promise to write."

Mrs. Ellmother promised, and hastened away. Emily looked after her from the window as long as she was in view. "I wish I could feel sure of Francine," she said to herself.

"In what way?" asked the hard voice of Francine, speaking at the door. It was not in Emily's frank and fearless nature to shrink from a plain reply. She completed her half-formed thought without a moment's hesitation.

"I wish I could feel sure," she answered, "that you will be kind to Mrs. Ellmother."

"Are you afraid I shall make her life one scene of torment?" Francine asked, with her keenest irony. "How can I answer for myself? I can't look into the future."

"For once in your life can you be in earnest?" Emily said.

"For once in your life can you take a joke?" Francine replied.

Emily said no more. She privately resolved to shorten her visit to Brighton.

BOOK THE THIRD.—THE SPELL.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN THE GRAY ROOM.

THE house used by Miss Ladd and her pupils had been built in the early part of the present century, by a merchant proud of his money, and eager to distinguish himself as the owner of the largest country-seat in the neighborhood.

After his death Miss Ladd had taken Netherwoods (as the place was called), finding her own house insufficient for the accommodation of the increasing number of her pupils. A lease was granted to her on moderate terms. Netherwoods failed to attract persons of distinction in search of a country residence. The grounds were beautiful; but no landed property—not even a park—was attached to the house. Excepting the few acres on which the building stood, the surrounding land belonged to a retired naval officer of old family, who resented the attempt of a merchant of low birth to assume the position of a gentleman. No matter what proposals might be made to the admiral, he refused them all. The privilege of shooting was not one of the attractions offered to tenants; the country presented no facilities for hunting; and the only stream in the neighborhood was not preserved. In consequence of these drawbacks, the merchant's representatives had to choose between a proposal to use Netherwoods as a lunatic asylum, or to accept as tenant the respectable mistress of a fashionable and prosperous school. They decided in favor of Miss Ladd.

The contemplated change in Francine's position was accomplished, in that vast house, without inconvenience. There were rooms unoccupied, even when the limit assigned to the number of pupils had been reached. On the re-opening of the school Francine was offered her choice between two rooms on one of the upper stories and two on the ground-floor. She chose these last.

Her sitting-room and bedroom, situated at the back of the house, communicated with each other. The sitting-room, ornamented with a pretty paper of delicate gray, and furnished with curtains of the same color, had been accordingly named "The Gray Room." It had a French window, which opened on the terrace overlooking the garden and the grounds. Some fine old engravings from the grand landscapes of Claude (part of a collection of prints possessed by Miss Ladd's father) hung on the walls. The carpet was in harmony with the curtains, and the furniture was of light-colored wood, which helped the general effect of subdued brightness that made the charm of the room. "If you are not happy here," Miss Ladd said, "I despair of you." And Francine answered, "Yes, it's very pretty; but I wish it was not so small."

On the twelfth of August the regular routine of the school was resumed. Alban Morris found two strangers in his class, to fill the vacancies left by Emily and Cecilia. Mrs. Ellmother was duly established in her new place. She produced an unfavorable impression in the servants' hall, not (as the handsome chief house-maid explained) because she was ugly and old, but because she was "a person who didn't talk." The prejudice against habitual silence, among the lower order of the people, is almost as inveterate as the prejudice against red hair.

In the evening, on that first day of renewed studies—while the girls were in the grounds, after tea—Francine had at last completed the arrangement of her rooms, and had dismissed Mrs. Ellmother (kept hard at work since the morning) to take a little rest. Standing alone at her window, the West Indian heiress wondered what she had better do next. She glanced at the girls on the lawn, and decided that they were unworthy of serious notice on the part of a person so specially favored as herself. She turned sideways, and looked along the length of the terrace. At the far end a tall man was slowly pacing to and fro, with his head down and his hands in his pockets. Francine recognized the rude drawing master, who had torn up his view of the village, after she had saved it from being blown into the pond.

She stepped out on the terrace, and called to him. He stopped, and looked up.

"Do you want me?" he called back.

"Of course I do!"

She advanced a little to meet him, and offered encouragement under the form of a hard smile. Although his manners might be unpleasant, he had claims on the indulgence of a young lady who was at a loss how to employ her idle time. In the first place, he was a man. In the second place, he was not as old as the music master, or as ugly as the dancing master. In the third place, he was an admirer of Emily; and the opportunity of trying to shake his allegiance by means of a flirtation, in Emily's absence, was too good an opportunity to be lost.

"Do you remember how rude you were to me on the day when you were

sketching in the summer-house?" Francine asked, with snappish playfulness. "I expect you to make yourself agreeable this time—I am going to pay you a compliment."

He waited, with exasperating composure, to hear what the proposed compliment might be. The furrow between his eyebrows looked deeper than ever. There were signs of secret trouble in that dark face, so grimly and so resolutely composed. The school, without Emily, presented the severest trial of endurance that he had encountered since the day when he had been deserted and disgraced by his affianced wife.

"You are an artist," Francine proceeded, "and therefore a person of taste. I want to have your opinion of my sitting-room. Criticism is invited; pray come in."

He seemed to be unwilling to accept the invitation, then altered his mind, and followed Francine. She had visited Emily; she was, perhaps, in a fair way to become Emily's friend. He remembered that he had already lost an opportunity of studying her character, and—if he saw the necessity—of warning Emily not to encourage the advances of Miss De Sor.

"Very pretty," he remarked, looking round the room, without appearing to care for anything in it except the prints.

Francine was bent on fascinating him. She raised her eyebrows and lifted her hands in playful remonstrance. "Do remember it's *my* room," she said, "and take some little interest in it for *my* sake."

"What do you want me to say?" he asked.

"Come and sit down by me." She made room for him on the sofa. Her one favorite aspiration—the longing to excite envy in others—expressed itself in her next words. "Say something pretty," she answered; "say you would like to have such a room as this."

"I should like to have your prints," he remarked. "Will that do?"

"It wouldn't do—from anybody else. Ah, Mr. Morris, I know why you are not as nice as you might be! You are not happy. The school has lost its one attraction in losing our dear Emily. You feel it—I know you feel it." She assisted this expression of sympathy to produce the right effect by a sigh. "What would I not give to inspire such devotion as yours! I don't envy Emily; I only wish—" She paused in confusion, and opened her fan. "Isn't it pretty?" she said, with an ostentatious appearance of changing the subject.

Alban behaved like a monster; he began to talk of the weather. "I think this is the hottest day we have had," he said; "no wonder you want your fan. Netherwoods is an airless place at this season of the year."

She controlled her temper. "I do indeed feel the heat," she admitted, with a resignation which gently reproved him; "it is so heavy and oppressive here, after Brighton. Perhaps my sad life, far away from home and friends, makes me sensitive to trifles. Do you think so, Mr. Morris?"

The mercileless man said he thought it was the situation of the house. "Miss Ladd took the place in the spring," he said, "and only discovered the one objection to it some months afterward. We are in the highest part of the valley here; but, you see, it's a valley surrounded by hills, and on three sides the hills are near us. All very well in winter, but in summer I have known girls in this school so out of health in the relaxing atmosphere that they have been sent home again."

Francine suddenly showed an interest in what he was saying. If he had cared to observe her closely—if he had only looked at her—he must have noticed it.

"Do you mean that the girls were really ill?" she asked.

"No. They slept badly—lost appetite—started at trifling noises. In short, their nerves were out of order."

"Did they get well again at home, in another air?"

"Not a doubt of it," he answered, beginning to get weary of the subject.

"May I look at your books?"

Francine's interest in the influence of different atmospheres on health was not exhausted yet. "Do you know where the girls lived when they were at home?" she inquired.

"I know where one of them lived. She was the best pupil I ever had—and I remember she lived in Yorkshire." He was so weary of the idle curiosity—as it appeared to him—which persisted in asking trifling questions, that he left his seat and crossed the room. "May I look at your books?" he repeated.

"Oh yes."

The conversation was suspended for a while. The lady thought, "I should like to box his ears!" The gentleman thought, "She's only an inquisitive fool, after all!" His examination of her books confirmed him in the delusion that there was really nothing in Francine's character which rendered it necessary to caution Emily against the advances of her new friend. Turning away from the book-case he made the first excuse that occurred to him for putting an end to the interview.

"I must beg you to let me return to my duties, Miss De Sor. I have to correct the young ladies' drawings before they begin again to-morrow."

Francine's wounded vanity made a last expiring attempt to steal the heart of Emily's lover.

"You remind me that I have a favor to ask," she said. "I don't attend the other classes; but I should so like to join *your* class! May I?" She looked up at him with a languishing appearance of entreaty which sorely tried Alban's capacity to keep his face in serious order. He acknowledged the compliment paid to him in studiously commonplace terms, and got a little nearer to the open window. Francine's obstinacy was not conquered yet.

"My education has been sadly neglected," she continued; "but I have had some little instruction in drawing. You will not find me so ignorant as some of the other girls." She waited a little, anticipating a few complimentary words. Alban waited also—in silence. "I shall look forward with pleasure to my lessons under such an artist as yourself," she went on, and waited again, and was disappointed again. "Perhaps," she resumed, "I may become your favorite pupil—who knows?"

"Who indeed?"

It was not much to say, when he spoke at last, but it was enough to encourage Francine. She called him "Dear Mr. Morris"; she pleaded for permission to take her first lesson immediately; she clasped her hands—"Please say Yes."

"I can't say Yes till you have complied with the rules."

"Are they *your* rules?"

She looked at him with eyes which expressed the readiest submission—in that case. He entirely failed to see it; he said they were Miss Ladd's rules—and wished her good-evening.

She watched him, walking away down the terrace. How was he paid? Did he receive a yearly salary, or did he get a little extra money for each new pupil who took drawing lessons? In this last case Francine saw her opportunity (in the popular phrase) of being even with him. "You brute! catch me attending your class!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RECOLLECTIONS OF SAN DOMINGO.

THE night was oppressively hot. Finding it impossible to sleep, Francine lay quietly in her bed, thinking. The subject of her reflections was a person who occupied the humble position of her new servant.

Mrs. Ellmother looked wretchedly ill. Mrs. Ellmother had told Emily that her object in returning to domestic service was to try if change would relieve her from the oppression of her own thoughts. Mrs. Ellmother believed in vulgar superstitions which declared Friday to be an unlucky day, and which recommended throwing a pinch over your left shoulder if you happened to spill the salt.

In themselves these were trifling recollections; but they assumed a certain importance, derived from the associations which they called forth. They reminded Francine, by some mental process which she was at a loss to trace, of Sappho the slave, and of her life at San Domingo.

She struck a light, and unlocked her writing-desk. From one of the drawers she took out an old household account-book.

The first page contained some entries, relating to domestic expenses, in her own handwriting. They recalled one of her efforts to occupy her idle time by relieving her mother of the cares of housekeeping. For a day or two she had persevered, and then she had ceased to feel any interest in her new employment. The remainder of the book was completely filled up in a beautifully clear handwriting, beginning on the second page. A title had been found for the manuscript by Francine. She had written at the top of the page, "Sappho's Nonsense."

After reading the first few sentences she rapidly turned over the leaves, and stopped at a blank space near the end of the book. Here again she had added a title. This time it implied a compliment to the writer. The page was headed, "Sappho's Sense."

She read this latter part of the manuscript with the closest attention:

"I entreat my kind and dear young mistress not to suppose that I believe in witchcraft, after such an education as I have received. When I wrote down, at your bidding, all that I had told you by word of mouth, I can not imagine what delusion possessed me. You say I have a negro side to my character, which I inherit from my mother. Did you mean this, dear mistress, as a joke? I am almost afraid that it is sometimes not far off from the truth.

"Let me be careful, however, to avoid leading you into a mistake. It is really true that the man-slave I spoke of did pine and die, after the spell

had been cast on him by my witch-mother's image of wax. But I ought also to have told you that circumstances favored the working of the spell; the fatal end was not brought about by supernatural means."

"The poor wretch was not in good health at the time, and our owner had occasion to employ him in a valley of the island far inland. I have been told, and can well believe, that the climate there is different from the climate on the coast, in which the unfortunate slave had been accustomed to live. The overseer wouldn't believe him when he said the valley air would be his death; and the negroes, who might otherwise have helped him, all avoided a man whom they knew to be under the spell."

"This, you see, accounts for what might appear incredible to civilized persons. If you will do me a favor, you will burn this little book as soon as you have read what I have written here. If my request is not granted, I can only implore you to let no eyes but your own see these pages. My life might be in danger if the blacks knew what I have now told you, in the interests of truth."

Francine closed the book, and locked it up again in her desk. "Now I know," she said to herself, "what reminded me of San Domingo."

When Francine rang her bell the next morning, so long a time elapsed without producing an answer that she began to think of sending one of the house-servants to make inquiries. Before she could decide, Mrs. Ellmother presented herself, and offered her apologies.

"It's the first time I have overslept myself, miss, since I was a girl. Please to excuse me; it sha'n't happen again."

"Do you find that the air here makes you drowsy?" Francine asked.

Mrs. Ellmother shook her head. "I didn't get to sleep," she said, "till morning, and so I was too heavy to be up in time. But air has got nothing to do with it. Gentlefolks may have their whims and fancies. All air is the same to people like me."

"You enjoy good health, Mrs. Ellmother."

"Why not, miss? I have never had a doctor."

"Oh! That's your opinion of doctors, is it?"

"I won't have anything to do with them—if that's what you mean by my opinion," Mrs. Ellmother answered, doggedly. "How will you have your hair done?"

"The same as yesterday. Have you seen anything of Miss Emily? She went back to London the day after you left us."

"I haven't been in London. I'm thankful to say my lodgings are let to a good tenant."

"Then where have you lived while you were waiting to come here?"

"I had only one place to go to, miss; I went to the village where I was born. A friend found a corner for me. Ah, dear heart, it's a pleasant place there!"

"A place like this?"

"Lord help you! As little like this as chalk is to cheese. A fine big moor, miss, in Cumberland, without a tree in sight—look where you may. Something like a wind, I can tell you, when it takes to blowing there."

"Have you ~~never~~ been in this part of the country?"

"No."

"North, my new mistress took me to Canada."

Talk about air! If there was anything in it, the people in *that* air ought to live to be a hundred. I liked Canada."

"And who was your next mistress?"

Thus far Mrs. Ellmother had been ready enough to talk. Had she failed to hear what Francine had just said to her? or had she some reason for feeling reluctant to answer? In any case, a spirit of taciturnity took sudden possession of her: she was silent.

Francine (as usual) persisted. "Was your next place in service with Miss Emily's aunt?"

"Yes."

"Did the old lady always live in London?"

"No."

"What part of the country did she live in?"

"Kent."

"Among the hop gardens?"

"No."

"In what other part, then?"

"Isle of Thanet."

"Near the sea-coast?"

"Yes."

Even Francine could insist no longer: Mrs. Ellmother's reserve had beaten her—for that day at least. "Go into the hall," she said, "and see if there are any letters for me in the rack."

There was one letter bearing the Swiss postmark. Simple Cecilia was flattered and delighted by the charming manner in which Francine had written to her. She looked forward with impatience to the time when their present acquaintance might ripen into friendship. Would "dear Miss De Sor" waive all ceremony and consent to be a guest (later in the autumn) at her father's house? Circumstances connected with her sister's health would delay their return to England for a little while. By the end of the month she hoped to be at home again, and to hear if Francine was disengaged. Her address in England was Monksnoor Park, Hants.

Having read the letter, Francine drew a moral from it: "There is great use in a fool, when one knows how to manage her."

Having little appetite for her breakfast, she tried the experiment of a walk on the terrace. Alban Morris was right; the air at Netherwoods in summer-time *was* relaxing. The morning mist still hung over the lowest part of the valley, between the village and the hills beyond. A little exercise produced a feeling of fatigue. Francine returned to her room and trifled with her tea and toast.

Her next proceeding was to open her writing-desk and look into the old account-book once more. While it lay open on her lap she recalled what had passed that morning between Mrs. Ellmother and herself.

The old woman had been born and bred in the North on an open moor. She had been removed to the keen air of Canada when she left her birth-place. She had been in service after that on the breezy eastward coast of Kent. Would the change to the climate of Netherwoods produce any effect on Mrs. Ellmother? At her age, and with her seasoned constitution, would she feel it as those school-girls had felt it—especially that one

among them who lived in the bracing air of the North, the air of Yorkshire?

Weary of solitary thinking on one subject, Francine returned to the terrace with a vague idea of finding something to amuse her—that is to say, something she could turn into ridicule—if she joined the girls.

The next morning Mrs. Ellmother answered her mistress's bell without delay. "You have slept better this time," Francine said.

"No, miss. When I did get to sleep I was troubled by dreams. Another bad night—and no mistake!"

"I suspect your mind is not quite at ease," Francine suggested.

"Why do you suspect that, if you please?"

"You talked, when I met you at Miss Emily's, of wanting to get away from your own thoughts. Has the change to this place helped you?"

"It hasn't helped me as I expected. Some people's thoughts stick fast."

"Remorseful thoughts?" Francine inquired.

Mrs. Ellmother held up her forefinger, and shook it with a gesture of reproof. "I thought we agreed, miss, that there was to be no pumping."

The business of the toilet proceeded in silence.

A week passed. During an interval in the labors of the school Miss Ladd knocked at the door of Francine's room.

"I want to speak to you, my dear, about Mrs. Ellmother. Have you noticed that she doesn't seem to be in good health?"

"She looks rather pale, Miss Ladd."

"It's more serious than that, Francine. The servants tell me that she has hardly any appetite. She herself acknowledges that she sleeps badly. I noticed her yesterday evening in the garden under the school-room window. One of the girls dropped a dictionary. She started at that slight noise as if it terrified her. Her nerves are seriously out of order. Can you prevail upon her to see the doctor?"

Francine hesitated, and made an excuse. "I think she would be much more likely, Miss Ladd, to listen to you. Do you mind speaking to her?"

"Certainly not."

Mrs. Ellmother was immediately sent for. "What is your pleasure, miss?" she said to Francine.

Miss Ladd interposed. "It is I who wish to speak to you, Mrs. Ellmother. For some days past I have been sorry to see you looking so ill."

"I never was ill in my life, ma'am."

Miss Ladd gently persisted. "I hear that you have lost your appetite."

"I never was a great eater, ma'am."

It was evidently useless to risk any further allusion to Mrs. Ellmother's symptoms. Miss Ladd tried another method of persuasion. "I dare say I may be mistaken," she said; "but I do really feel anxious about you. To set my mind at rest, will you see the doctor?"

"The doctor! Do you think I'm going to begin taking physic at my time of life? Lord, ma'am! you do amuse me—you do indeed!" She burst into a sudden fit of laughter—the hysterical laughter which is on the verge of tears. With a desperate effort she controlled herself. "Please don't make a fool of me again," she said, and left the room.

"What a ———?" Miss Ladd asked.

Francine appeared to be still on her guard. "I don't know what to think," she said, evasively.

Miss Ladd looked at her in silent surprise, and withdrew.

Left by herself, Francine sat with her elbows on the table and her face in her hands, absorbed in thought. After a long interval she opened her desk—and hesitated. She took a sheet of note-paper—and paused, as if still in doubt. She snatched up her pen, with a sudden recovery of resolution—and addressed these lines to the landlady of a hotel in London:

"When I was placed under your care, on the night of my arrival from the West Indies, you kindly said I might ask you for any little service which might be within your power. I shall be greatly obliged to you if you can obtain for me, and send to this place, a supply of artists' modelling wax—sufficient for the production of a small image."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE DARK.

A WEEK later Alban Morris happened to be in Miss Ladd's study, with a report to make on the subject of his drawing class. Mrs. Ellmother interrupted them for a moment. She entered the room to return a book which Francine had borrowed that morning.

"Has Miss De Sor done with it already?" Miss Ladd asked.

"She won't read it, ma'am. She says the leaves smell of tobacco smoke."

Miss Ladd turned to Alban, and shook her head with an air of good-humored reproof. "I know who has been reading that book last," she said.

Alban pleaded guilty by a look. He was the only master in the school who smoked. As Mrs. Ellmother passed him on her way out he noticed the signs of suffering in her wasted face.

"That woman is surely in a bad state of health," he said. "Has she seen the doctor?"

"She flatly refuses to consult the doctor," Miss Ladd replied. "If she was a stranger, I should meet the difficulty by telling Miss De Sor (whose servant she is) that Mrs. Ellmother must be sent home. But I can not act in that peremptory manner toward a person in whom Emily is interested."

From that moment Mrs. Ellmother became a person in whom Alban was interested. Later in the day he met her in one of the lower corridors of the house, and spoke to her. "I am afraid the air of this place doesn't agree with you," he said.

Mrs. Ellmother's irritable objection to being told (even indirectly) that she looked ill expressed itself roughly in reply. "I dare say you mean well, sir, but I don't see how it matters to you whether the place agrees with me or not."

"Wait a minute," Alban answered, good-humoredly. "I am not quite a stranger to you."

"How do you make that out, if you please?"

"I know a young lady who has a sincere regard for you."

"You don't mean Miss Emily?"

"Yes, I do. I respect and admire Miss Emily, and I have tried, in my poor way, to be of some little service to her."

Mrs. Ellmother's haggard face instantly softened. "Please to forgive me, sir, for forgetting my manners," she said, simply. "I have had my health since the day I was born, and I don't like to be told in my old age that a new place doesn't agree with me."

Alban accepted this apology in a manner which at once won the heart of the North country woman. He shook hands with her. "You're one of the right sort," she said; "there are not many of them in this house."

Was she alluding to Francine? Alban tried to make the discovery. Polite circumlocution would be evidently thrown away on Mrs. Ellmother. "Is your young mistress one of the right sort?" he asked, bluntly.

The old servant's answer was expressed by a frowning look, followed by a plain question.

"Do you say that, sir, because you like my young mistress?"

"No."

"Please to shake hands again!" She said it—took his hand with a sudden grip that spoke for itself—and walked away.

Here was an exhibition of character which Alban was just the man to appreciate. "If I had been an old woman," he thought, in his dryly humorous way, "I believe I should have been like Mrs. Ellmother. We might have talked of Emily, if she had not left me in such a hurry. When shall I see her again?"

He was destined to see her again that night—under circumstances which he remembered to the end of his life.

The rules of Netherwoods, in summer-time, recalled the young ladies from their evening's recreation in the grounds at nine o'clock. After that hour Alban was free to smoke his pipe, and to linger among flower beds and trees, before he returned to his hot little rooms in the village. As a relief to the drudgery of teaching the young ladies, he had been using his pencil, when the day's lessons were over, for his own amusement. It was past ten o'clock before he lit his pipe, and began walking slowly to and fro on the path which led to the summer-house at the southern limit of the grounds.

In the perfect stillness of the night the clock of the village church was distinctly audible, striking the hours and the quarters. The moon had not risen, but the mysterious glimmer of starlight trembled on the large open space between the trees and the house.

Alban paused, admiring with an artist's eye the effect of light, so faintly and delicately beautiful, on the broad expanse of the lawn. "Does the man live who could paint that?" he asked himself. His memory recalled the works of the greatest of all landscape painters—the English artists of fifty years since. While recollections of many a noble picture were still passing through his mind, he was startled by the appearance of a bare-headed woman on the terrace steps.

She hurried down to the lawn, staggering as she ran; stopped, and looked back at the house; hastened onward toward the trees; stopped again, looking backward and forward, uncertain which way to turn next, and then advanced once more. He could now hear her heavily gasping for

breath. As she came nearer, the starlight showed a panic-stricken face—the face of Mrs. Ellmother.

Alban ran to meet her. She dropped on the grass before he could cross the short distance which separated them. As he raised her in his arms she looked at him wildly, and murmured and muttered in the vain attempt to speak. "Look at me again," he said. "Don't you remember the man who had some talk with you to-day?" She still stared at him vacantly: he tried again. "Don't you remember Miss Emily's friend?"

As the name passed his lips, her mind in some degree recovered its balance. "Yes," she said. "Emily's friend. I'm glad I have met with Emily's friend." She caught at Alban's arm, starting as if her own words had alarmed her. "What am I talking about? Did I say 'Emily'? A servant ought to say 'Miss Emily.' My head swims. Am I going mad?"

Alban led her to one of the garden chairs. "You're only a little frightened," he said. "Rest, and compose yourself."

She looked over her shoulder toward the house. "Not here! I've run away from a she-devil; I want to be out of sight. Further away, mister—I don't know your name. Tell me your name; I won't trust you unless you tell me your name!"

"Hush! hush! Call me Alban."

"I never heard of such a name; I won't trust you."

"You won't trust your friend, and Emily's friend? You don't mean that, I'm sure. Call me by my other name—call me 'Morris.'"

"Morris?" she repeated. "Ah, I've heard of people called 'Morris.' Look back! Your eyes are young—do you see her on the terrace?"

"There isn't a living soul to be seen anywhere."

With one hand he raised her as he spoke, and with the other he took up the chair. In a minute more they were out of sight of the house. He seated her so that she could rest her head against the trunk of a tree.

"What a good fellow!" the poor old creature said, admiring him; "he knows how my head pains me. Don't stand up! You're a tall man. She might see you."

"She can see nothing. Look at the trees behind us. Even the starlight doesn't get through them."

Mrs. Ellmother was not satisfied yet. "You take it coolly," she said. "Do you know who saw us together in the passage to-day? You good Morris, *she* saw us—she did. Wretch! Cruel, cunning, shameless wretch!"

In the shadows that were round them Alban could just see that she was shaking her clinched fists in the air. He made another attempt to control her. "Don't excite yourself. If she comes into the garden, she might hear you."

The appeal to her fears had its effect.

"That's true," she said, in lowered tones. Sudden distrust of him seized her the next moment. "Who told you I was excited?" she burst out. "It's you who are excited. Deny it if you dare! I begin to suspect you, Mr. Morris; I don't like your conduct. What has become of your pipe? I saw you put your pipe in your coat pocket. You did it when you set me down among the trees where *she* could see me. You are in league with her; she is coming to meet you here; you know she doesn't like tobacco smoke. Are you two going to put me in the mad-house?"

She started to her feet. It occurred to Alban that the speediest way of pacifying her might be by means of the pipe. Mere words would exercise no persuasive influence over that bewildered mind. Instant action of some kind would be far more likely to have the right effect. He put his pipe and his tobacco pouch into her hands, and so mastered her attention before he spoke.

"Do you know how to fill a man's pipe for him?" he asked.

"Haven't I filled my husband's pipe hundreds of times?" she answered, sharply.

"Very well. Now do it for me."

She took her chair again instantly, and filled the pipe. He lighted it, and seated himself on the grass, quietly smoking. "Do you think I'm in league with her now?" he asked, purposely adopting the rough tone of a man in her own rank of life.

She answered him as she might have answered her husband in the days of her unhappy marriage.

"Oh, don't gird at me—there's a good man! If I've been off my head for a minute or two, please not to notice me. It's cool and quiet here," the poor woman said, gratefully. "Bless God for the darkness; there's something comforting in the darkness—along with a good man like you. Give me a word of advice. You are my friend in need. What am I to do? I daren't go back to the house."

She was quiet enough now to suggest the hope that she might be able to give Alban some information. "Were you with Miss De Sor," he asked, "before you came out here? What did she do to frighten you?"

There was no answer. Mrs. Ellmother had abruptly risen once more. "Hush!" she whispered. "Don't I hear somebody near us?"

Alban at once went back along the winding path which they had followed. No creature was visible in the gardens or on the terrace. On returning, he found it impossible to use his eyes to any good purpose in the obscurity among the trees. He waited awhile, listening intently. No sound was audible: there was not even air enough to stir the leaves.

As he returned to the place that he had left, the silence was broken by the chimes of the distant church clock striking the three-quarters past ten.

Even that familiar sound jarred on Mrs. Ellmother's shattered nerves. The cry that escaped her relieved Alban of the feeling of uneasiness which still troubled him. In her state of mind and body she was at the mercy of any false alarm which might be raised by her own fears. He sat down by her again, opened his match-box to relight the pipe, and changed his mind. Mrs. Ellmother had unconsciously warned him to be cautious.

For the first time he thought it likely that the heat in the house might induce some of the inmates to try the cooler atmosphere in the grounds. If this happened, and if he continued to smoke, curiosity might tempt them to follow the scent of tobacco hanging on the stagnant air.

"Is there nobody near us?" Mrs. Ellmother asked. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Now tell me—did you really mean it when you said just now that you wanted my advice?"

"Of course I meant it. Who else have I got to help me?"

"I am ready and willing to help you, but I can't do it unless I know first what has passed between you and Miss De Sor. Will you trust me?"

"I will."

"May I depend on you?"

"I give you my promise—you may depend on that."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TREACHERY OF THE PIPE.

THERE was a pause. It was too dark to see in Mrs. Ellmother's face why she was hesitating. Surprised by her silence, Alban asked if she was beginning already to repent of her promise.

"It isn't that," she said; "it's my poor mind. I'm all abroad—I don't know what to say first."

"Let me try if I can help you. You have been with Miss De Sor to-night. Did she ask you to stay with her when you went into her room?"

"That's it. She rang for me, to see how I was getting on with my needle-work, and she was what I call hearty for the first time since I have been in her service. I didn't think badly of her when she first talked of engaging me, and I've had reason to repent of my opinion ever since. Oh, she showed the cloven foot to-night! 'Sit down,' she says; 'I have nothing to read, and I hate work; let's have a little chat.' She's got a glib tongue of her own. All I could do was to say a word now and then to keep her going. She talked and talked till it was time to light the lamp. She was particular in telling me to put the shade over it. We were half in the dark and half in the light. She trapped me (Lord knows how!) into talking about foreign parts—I mean the place she lived in before they sent her to England. Have you heard that she comes from the West Indies?"

"Yea, I have heard that. Go on."

"Wait a bit, sir. There's something, by your leave, that I want to know. Do you believe in Witchcraft?"

"Of course not. Did Miss De Sor put that question to you?"

"She did."

"And how did you answer?"

"Neither in one way nor the other. I'm in two minds about that matter of Witchcraft. When I was a girl there was an old woman in our village who was a sort of show. People came to see her from all the country round—gentlefolks among them. It was her great age that made her famous. More than a hundred years old, sir! One of our neighbors didn't believe in her age, and she heard of it. She cast a spell on his flock—I tell you, she sent a plague on his sheep, the plague of the Bots. The whole flock died; I remember it well. Some said the sheep would have had the Bots anyhow. Some said it was the spell. Which of them was right? How am I to settle it?"

"Did you mention this to Miss De Sor?"

"I was obliged to mention it. Didn't I tell you just now that I can't make up my mind about Witchcraft? 'You don't seem to know whether you believe or disbelieve,' she says. It made me look like a fool. I told her I had my reasons—and then I was obliged to give them."

"And what did she do then?"

"She said, 'I've got a better story of Witchcraft than yours.' And she opened a little book, with a lot of writing in it, and began to read. Her story made my flesh creep. It turns me cold, sir, when I think of it now."

He heard her moaning and shuddering. Strongly as his interest was excited, there was a compassionate reluctance in him to ask her to go on. His merciful scruples proved to be needless. The fascination of beauty it is possible to resist. The fascination of horror fastens its fearful hold on us, struggle against it as we may. Mrs. Ellmother repeated what she had heard in spite of herself.

"It happened in the West Indies," she said; "and the writing of a woman slave was the writing in the little book. The slave wrote about her mother. Her mother was a black—a witch in her own country. There was a forest in her own country. The devil taught her witchcraft in the forest. The serpents and the wild beasts were afraid to touch her. She lived without eating. She was sold for a slave, and sent to the island—an island in the West Indies. An old man lived there—the wickedest man of them all. He filled the black witch with devilish knowledge. She learned to make the image of wax. The image of wax casts spells. You put pins in the image of wax. At every pin you put the person under the spell gets nearer and nearer to death. There was a poor black in the island. He offended the witch. She made his image in wax; she cast spells on him. He couldn't sleep; he couldn't eat; he was such a coward that common noises frightened him. Like me! O God, like me!"

"Wait a little," Alban interposed. "You are exciting yourself again—wait."

"You're wrong, sir! You think it ended when she finished her story and shut up her book; there's worse to come than anything you've heard yet. I don't know what I did to offend her. She looked at me and spoke to me as if I was the dirt under her feet. 'If you're too stupid to understand what I have been reading,' she says, 'get up and go to the glass. Look at yourself, and remember what happened to the slave who was under the spell. You're getting paler and paler, and thinner and thinner; you're pining away just as he did. Shall I tell you why?' She snatched off the shade from the lamp, and put her hand under the table, and brought out an image of wax. *My* image! She pointed to three pins in it. 'One,' she says, 'for no sleep; one for no appetite; one for broken nerves.' I asked her what I had done to make such a bitter enemy of her. She says, 'Remember what I asked of you when we talked of your being my servant. Choose which you will do. Die by inches' (I swear she said it, as I hope to be saved)—'die by inches, or tell me—'"

There—in the full frenzy of the agitation that possessed her—there, Mrs. Ellmother suddenly stopped.

Alban's first impression was that she might have fainted. He looked closer, and could just see her shadowy figure still seated in the chair. He asked if she was ill. No.

"Then why don't you go on?"

"I have done," she answered.

"Do you think you can put me off," he rejoined, sternly, "with such an excuse as that? What did Miss De Sor ask you to tell her? You promised to trust me. Be as good as your word."

In the days of her health and strength she would have set him at defiance. All she could do now was to appeal to his mercy.

"Make some allowance for me," she said. "I have been terribly upset. What has become of my courage? What has broken me down in this way? Spare me, sir."

He refused to listen. "This vile attempt to practice on your fears may be repeated," he reminded her. "More base advantage may be taken of the nervous derangement from which you are suffering in the climate of this place. You little know me if you think I will allow that to go on."

She made a last effort to plead with him. "Oh, sir, is this behaving like the good, kind man I thought you were? You say you are Miss Emily's friend. Don't press me, for Miss Emily's sake!"

"Emily!" Alban exclaimed. "Is *she* concerned in this?"

There was a change to tenderness in his voice, which persuaded Mrs. Ellmother that she had found her way to the weak side of him. Her one effort now was to strengthen the impression which she believed herself to have produced.

"Miss Emily *is* concerned in it," she confessed.

"In what way?"

"Never mind in what way."

"But I do mind."

"I tell you, sir, Miss Emily must never know it to her dying day!"

The first suspicion of the truth crossed Alban's mind. "And Emily *might* have known it," he added, "if Miss De Sor had forced you into telling her what she wanted to find out. You must have said something to excite her curiosity."

"Never!"

"Are you sure you didn't betray yourself when she showed the image and threatened you?"

"I would have died first!" The reply had hardly escaped her before she regretted it. "What makes you want to be so sure about it?" she said. "It looks as if you knew—"

"I do know."

"What?"

The kindest thing that he could do now was to speak out. "Your secret is no secret to *me*," he said.

Rage and fear shook her together. For the moment she was like the Mrs. Ellmother of former days. "You lie!" she cried.

"I speak the truth."

"I won't believe you! I daren't believe you!"

"Listen to me. In Emily's interests, listen to me. I have read of the murder at Zeeland—"

"That's nothing! The man was a namesake of her father."

"The man was her father himself. Keep your seat! There is nothing to be alarmed about. I know that Emily is ignorant of the horrid death that her father died. I know that you and your late mistress have kept the discovery from her to this day. I know the love and pity which plead your excuse for deceiving her, and the circumstances that favored the deception. My good creature, Emily's peace of mind is as sacred to me

as it is to you! I love her as I love my own life—and better. Are you calmer now?"

He heard her crying: it was the best relief that could come to her. After waiting awhile to let the tears have their way, he helped her to rise. There was no more to be said now. The one thing to do was to take her back to the house.

"I can give you a word of advice," he said, "before we part for the night. You must leave Miss De Sor's service at once. Your health will be a sufficient excuse. Give her warning immediately."

Mrs. Ellmother hung back when he offered her his arm. The bare prospect of seeing Francine again was revolting to her. On Alban's assurance that the notice to leave could be given in writing, she made no further resistance. The village clock struck eleven as they ascended the terrace steps.

A minute later another person left the grounds by the path which led to the house. Alban's precautions had been taken too late. The smell of tobacco smoke had guided Francine, when she was at a loss which way to turn next in search of Mrs. Ellmother. For the last quarter of an hour she had been listening, hidden among the trees.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHANGE OF AIR.

THE inmates of Netherwoods rose early, and went to bed early. When Alban and Mrs. Ellmother arrived at the back door of the house they found it locked.

The only light visible along the whole length of the building glimmered through the Venetian blind of the window entrance to Francine's sitting-room. Alban proposed to get admission to the house by that way. In her horror of again encountering Francine, Mrs. Ellmother positively refused to follow him when he turned away from the door. "They can't be all asleep yet," she said, and rang the bell.

One person was still out of bed, and that person was the mistress of the house. They recognized her voice in the customary question, "Who's there?" The door having been opened, good Miss Ladd looked backward and forward between Alban and Mrs. Ellmother with the bewildered air of a lady who doubted the evidence of her own eyes. The next moment her sense of humor overpowered her. She burst out laughing.

"Close the door, Mr. Morris," she said, "and be so good as to tell me what this means. Have you been giving a lesson in drawing by star-light?"

Mrs. Ellmother moved so that the light of the lamp in Miss Ladd's hand fell on her face. "I'm faint and giddy," she said; "let me get to my bed."

Miss Ladd instantly followed her. "Pray forgive me! I didn't see you were ill when I spoke," she gently explained. "What can I do for you?"

"Thank you kindly, ma'am. I want nothing but peace and quiet. I wish you good-night."

Alban followed Miss Ladd to her study on the front side of the house.

He had just mentioned the circumstances under which he and Mrs. Ellmother had met, when they were interrupted by a tap at the door. Francine had got back to her room unperceived, by way of the French window. She now presented herself, with an elaborate apology, and with the nearest approach to a penitent expression of which her face was capable.

"I am ashamed, Miss Ladd, to intrude on you at this time of night. My only excuse is that I am anxious about Mrs. Ellmother. I heard you just now in the hall. If she is really ill, I am the unfortunate cause of it."

"In what way, Miss De Sor?"

"I am sorry to say I frightened her—while we were talking in my room—quite unintentionally. She rushed to the door, and ran out. I supposed she had gone to her bedroom; I had no idea she was in the grounds."

In this false statement there was mingled a grain of truth. It was true that Francine believed Mrs. Ellmother to have taken refuge in her room, for she had examined the room. Finding it empty, and failing to discover the fugitive in other parts of the house, she had become alarmed, and had tried the grounds next, with the formidable result which has been already related. Concealing this circumstance, she had lied in such a skillfully artless manner that Alban (having no suspicion of what had really happened to sharpen his wits) was as completely deceived as Miss Ladd. Proceeding to further explanation—and remembering that she was in Alban's presence—Francine was careful to keep herself within the strict limit of truth. She only lied again in declaring that Mrs. Ellmother had supposed she was in earnest, when she was guilty of no more serious offense than playing a practical joke.

In this case Alban was necessarily in a position to detect the falsehood. But it was so evidently in Francine's interests to present her conduct in the most favorable light, that the discovery failed to excite his suspicion. He waited in silence, while Miss Ladd administered a severe reproof. Francine having left the room as penitently as she had entered it (with her handkerchief over her tearless eyes), he was at liberty, with certain reserves, to return to what had passed between Mrs. Ellmother and himself.

"The fright which the poor old woman has suffered," he said, "has led to one good result. I have found her ready at last to acknowledge that she is ill, and inclined to believe that the change to Netherwoods has had something to do with it. I have advised her to take the course which you suggested by leaving this house. Is it possible to dispense with the usual delay, when she gives notice to leave Miss De Sor's service?"

"She need feel no anxiety, poor soul, on that account," Miss Ladd replied. "In any case, I had arranged that a week's notice on either side should be enough. As it is, I will speak to Francine myself. The least she can do to express her regret is to place no difficulties in Mrs. Ellmother's way."

The next day was Sunday.

Miss Ladd broke through her rule of attending to secular affairs on week-days only, and after consulting with Mrs. Ellmother, arranged with Francine that her servant should be at liberty to leave Netherwoods (health permitting) on the next day. But one difficulty remained. Mrs. Ellmother was in no condition to take the long journey to her birth-place in Cumberland, and her own lodgings in London had been let. Under these cir-

cumstances, what was the best arrangement that could be made for her? Miss Ladd wisely and kindly wrote to Emily on the subject, and asked for a speedy reply.

Later in the day Alban was sent for to see Mrs. Ellmother. He found her anxiously waiting to hear what had passed on the previous night between Miss Ladd and himself. "Were you careful, sir, to say nothing about Miss Emily?"

"I was especially careful; I never alluded to her in any way."

"Has Miss De Sor spoken to you?"

"I have not given her the opportunity."

"She's an obstinate one—she might try."

"If she does, she shall hear my opinion of her in plain words."

The talk between them turned next on Alban's discovery of the secret, of which Mrs. Ellmother had believed herself to be the sole depositary since Miss Letitia's death. Without alarming her by any needless allusion to Dr. Allday or to Miss Jethro, he answered her inquiries (so far as he was himself concerned) without reserve. Her curiosity once satisfied, she showed no disposition to pursue the topic. She pointed to Miss Ladd's cat, fast asleep by the side of an empty saucer.

"Is it a sin, Mr. Morris, to wish I was Tom? *He* doesn't trouble himself about his life that is past or his life that is to come. If I could only empty my saucer and go to sleep, I shouldn't be thinking of the number of people in this world, like myself, who would be better out of it than in it. Miss Ladd has got me my liberty to-morrow, and I don't even know where to go when I leave this place."

"Suppose you follow Tom's example?" Alban suggested. "Enjoy to-day (in that comfortable chair), and let to-morrow take care of itself."

To-morrow arrived, and justified Alban's system of philosophy. Emily answered Miss Ladd's letter, to excellent purpose, by telegraph.

"I leave London to-day with Cecilia" (the message announced) "for Monksmoor Park, Hants. Will Mrs. Ellmother take care of the cottage in my absence? I shall be away for a month at least. All is prepared for her if she consents."

Mrs. Ellmother gladly accepted this proposal. In the interval of Emily's absence she could easily arrange to return to her own lodgings. With words of sincere gratitude she took leave of Miss Ladd, but no persuasion would induce her to say good-by to Francine. "Do me one more kindness, ma'am: don't tell Miss De Sor when I go away." Ignorant of the provocation which had produced this unforgiving temper of mind, Miss Ladd gently remonstrated. "Miss De Sor received my reproof in a penitent spirit; she expresses sincere sorrow for having thoughtlessly frightened you. Both yesterday and to-day she has made kind inquiries after your health. Come! come! don't bear malice; wish her good-by." Mrs. Ellmother's answer was characteristic: "I'll say good-by by telegraph when I get to London."

Her last words were addressed to Alban: "If you can find a way of doing it, sir, keep those two apart."

"Do you mean Emily and Miss De Sor?"

"Yes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know."

"Is that quite reasonable, Mrs. Ellmother?"

"I dare say not. I only know that I *am* afraid."

The pony-chaise took her away. Alban's class was not yet ready for him. He waited on the terrace.

Innocent alike of all knowledge of the serious reason for fear which did really exist, Mrs. Ellmother and Alban felt, nevertheless, the same vague distrust of an intimacy between the two girls. Idle, vain, malicious, false—to know that Francine's character presented these faults, without any discoverable merits to set against them, was surely enough to justify a gloomy view of the prospect, if she succeeded in winning the position of Emily's friend. Alban reasoned it out logically in this way, without satisfying himself, and without accounting for the remembrance that haunted him of Mrs. Ellmother's farewell look. "A commonplace man would say we are both in a morbid state of mind," he thought; "and sometimes commonplace men turn out to be right."

He was too deeply preoccupied to notice that he had advanced perilously near to Francine's window. She suddenly stepped out of her room, and spoke to him.

"Do you happen to know, Mr. Morris, why Mrs. Ellmother has gone away without bidding me good-by?"

"She was probably afraid, Miss De Sor, that you might make her the victim of another joke."

Francine eyed him steadily. "Have you any particular reason for speaking in that way?"

"I am not aware that I have answered you rudely—if that is what you mean."

"That is *not* what I mean. You seem to have taken a dislike to me. I should be glad to know why."

"I dislike cruelty—and you have behaved cruelly to Mrs. Ellmother."

"Meaning to be cruel?" Francine inquired.

"You know as well as I do, Miss De Sor, that I can't answer that question."

Francine looked at him again. "Am I to understand that we are enemies?" she asked.

"You are to understand," he replied, "that a person who is employed by Miss Ladd can not always presume to express his sentiments in speaking to the young ladies."

"If that means anything, Mr. Morris, it means that we are enemies."

"It means, Miss De Sor, that I am the drawing master at this school, and that I am called to my class."

Francine returned to her room, relieved of the only doubt that had troubled her. Plainly no suspicion that she had overheard what passed between Mrs. Ellmother and himself existed in Alban's mind. As for the use to be made of her discovery, she felt no difficulty in deciding to wait, and be guided by events. Her curiosity and her self-esteem had been alike gratified: she had got the better of Mrs. Ellmother at last, and with that triumph she was content. While Emily remained her friend, it would be an act of useless cruelty to disclose the terrible truth. There had certainly been a coolness between them at Brighton. But Francine—still

influenced by the magnetic attraction which drew her to Emily—did not conceal from herself that she had offered the provocation, and had been, therefore, the person to blame. "I can set all that right," she thought, "when we meet at Monksmoor Park." She opened her desk, and wrote the shortest and sweetest of letters to Cecilia. "I am entirely at the disposal of my charming friend on any convenient day—may I add, my dear, the sooner the better?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"THE LADY WANTS YOU, SIR."

THE pupils of the drawing class put away their pencils and color boxes in high good-humor: the teacher's vigilant eye for faults had failed him for the first time in their experience. Not one of them had been re-proved; they had chattered and giggled and drawn caricatures on the margin of the paper as freely as if the master had left the room. Alban's wandering attention was indeed beyond the reach of control. His interview with Francine had doubled his sense of responsibility toward Emily, while he was farther, than ever from seeing how he could interfere to any useful purpose in his present position, and with his reasons for writing under reserve.

One of the servants addressed him as he was leaving the school-room. The landlady's boy was waiting in the hall, with a message from his lodgings.

"Now, then, what is it?" he asked, irritably.

"The lady wants you, sir." With this mysterious answer the boy presented a visiting-card. The name inscribed on it was "Miss Jethro."

She had arrived by the train, and she was then waiting at Alban's lodgings. "Say I will be with her directly." Having given the message, he stood for a while with his hat in his hand literally lost in astonishment. It was simply impossible to guess at Miss Jethro's object, and yet, with the usual perversity of human nature, he was still wondering what she could possibly want with him, up to the final moment when he opened the door of his sitting-room.

She rose and bowed with the same grace of movement and the same well-bred composure of manner which Dr. Allday had noticed when she entered his consulting-room. Her dark, melancholy eyes rested on Alban with a look of gentle interest. A faint flush of color animated for a moment the faded beauty of her face, passed away again, and left it paler than before.

"I can not conceal from myself," she began, "that I am intruding on you under embarrassing circumstances."

"May I ask, Miss Jethro, to what circumstances you allude?"

"You forget, Mr. Morris, that I left Miss Ladd's school in a manner which justified doubt of me in the minds of strangers."

"Speaking as one of those strangers," Alban replied, "I can not feel that I had any right to form an opinion on a matter which only concerned Miss Ladd and yourself."

Miss Jethro bowed gravely. "You encourage me to hope," she said, "place a favorable construction on my visit when I men-

tion my motive. I ask you to receive me in the interests of Miss Emily Brown."

Stating her purpose in calling on him in those plain terms, she added to the amazement which Alban already felt, by handing to him—as if she was presenting an introduction—a letter marked "Private," addressed to her by Dr. Allday.

"I may tell you," she explained, "that I had no idea of troubling you until Dr. Allday suggested it. I wrote to him in the first instance, and there is his reply. Pray read it."

The letter was dated "Penzance"; and the doctor wrote, as he spoke, without ceremony:

"**MADAM**,—Your letter has been forwarded to me. I am spending my autumn holiday in the far west of Cornwall. However, if I had been at home it would have made no difference. I should have begged leave to decline holding any further conversation with you on the subject of Miss Emily Brown for the following reasons:

"In the first place, though I can not doubt your sincere interest in the young lady's welfare, I don't like your mysterious way of showing it. In the second place, when I called at your address in London after you had left my house, I found that you had taken to flight."

Arrived at that point, Alban offered to return the letter. "Do you really mean me to go on reading it?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, quietly. "If you go on—and if you hear what I have to say afterward—you can decide for yourself whether you will trust me or not."

Alban returned to the letter.

"In the third place, I have good reason to believe that you entered Miss Ladd's school as a teacher under false pretenses. After that discovery I tell you plainly I hesitate to attach credit to any statement that you may wish to make. At the same time I must not permit my prejudices (as you will probably call them) to stand in the way of Miss Emily's interests, supposing them to be really depending on any interference of yours. Miss Ladd's drawing master, Mr. Alban Morris, knows all that I know of Miss Emily's affairs, and is even more devoted to her service than I am. Whatever you might have said to me, you can say to him—with this possible advantage, that *he* may believe you."

There the letter ended. Alban handed it back in silence.

Miss Jethro pointed to the words, "Mr. Alban Morris knows all that I know of Miss Emily's affairs."

"Is that true?" she asked.

"Quite true."

"I don't complain, Mr. Morris, of the hard things said of me in that letter; you are at liberty to suppose, if you like, that I deserve them. There are explanations that I might offer, there are excuses that I might honestly make, which would perhaps satisfy you that Dr. Allday has misjudged my actions through ignorance of my motives. Attribute it to pride, or attribute it to reluctance to make needless demands on your time, I shall not attempt to defend myself. I leave you to decide whether the

woman who has shown you that letter—having something important to say to you—is a person who is mean enough to say it under false pretenses."

"Explain yourself freely, Miss Jethro; and be assured, beforehand, that I don't doubt your sincerity."

"My purpose in coming here," she answered, "is to induce you to use your influence over Miss Emily Brown—"

"With what object?" Alban asked, interrupting her.

"My object is her own good. Some years since I happened to become acquainted with a person who has attained some celebrity as a preacher. You have perhaps heard of Mr. Miles Mirabel?"

"I have heard of him."

"After a long interval I have seen him again," Miss Jethro proceeded.

"He tells me he has been introduced to a young lady who was formerly one of Miss Ladd's pupils, and who is the daughter of Mr. Wyvil, of Monksmoor Park. He has called on Mr. Wyvil; and he has since received an invitation to stay at Mr. Wyvil's house. The day fixed for the visit is Monday, the fifth of next month."

Alban listened, at a loss to know what interest he was supposed to have in being made acquainted with Mr. Mirabel's engagements. Miss Jethro's next words enlightened him.

"You are perhaps aware," she resumed, "that Miss Emily Brown is Miss Wyvil's intimate friend. She will be one of the guests at Monksmoor Park. If there are any obstacles which you can place in her way—if there is any influence which you can exert, without exciting suspicion of your motive—prevent her, I entreat you, from accepting Miss Wyvil's invitation until Mr. Mirabel's visit has come to an end."

"Why am I to interfere, Miss Jethro?"

"I dare not tell you why."

Alban remonstrated. "You can hardly expect me to be satisfied," he said, "with such an answer as that. Is there anything against Mr. Mirabel?"

"I say nothing against him."

"Is Miss Emily acquainted with him?"

"No."

"Is he a person with whom it would be disagreeable to her to associate?"

"Quite the contrary."

"And yet you expect me to prevent them from meeting. Be reasonable, Miss Jethro."

"I can only be in earnest, Mr. Morris—more truly, more deeply in earnest than you can suppose. I declare to you that I am speaking in Miss Emily's dearest interests. Do you still refuse to exert yourself for her sake?"

"I am spared the pain of refusal," Alban answered. "The time for interference has gone by. She is at this moment on her way to Monksmoor Park."

Miss Jethro attempted to rise, and dropped back into her chair. "Waiter," she said, faintly. After drinking from the glass to the last drop, she began to revive. Her little travelling bag was on the floor at her side. **She took out a railway guide, and tried to consult it. Her fingers trembled**

incessantly; she was unable to find the page to which she wished to refer. "Help me," she said. "I must go back to Hampshire by the first train that passes."

"To see Emily?" Alban asked.

"Quite useless. You have said it yourself—the time for interference has gone by. Look at the guide."

"What place shall I look for?"

"Look for Vale Regis."

Alban found the name. The train was due in ten minutes. "Surely you are not fit to travel so soon?" he suggested.

"Fit or not, I must see Mr. Mirabel. I must make the effort to keep them apart by appealing to *him*."

"With any hope of success?"

"With no hope, and with no interest in the man himself. Still I must try."

"Out of anxiety for Emily's welfare?"

"Out of anxiety to make atonement."

"To Emily?"

"To the memory of Emily's father."

This reply startled Alban. Before he could ask what it meant, Miss Jethro had left him.

In the emergencies of life a person readier of resource than Alban Morris it would not have been easy to discover. The extraordinary interview that had now come to an end had found his limits. Bewildered and helpless, he stood at the window of his room, and asked himself (as if he had been the weakest man living), "What shall I do?"

BOOK THE FOURTH.—THE DISCOVERY.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DANCING.

THE windows of the long drawing-room at Monksmoor are all thrown open to the conservatory. Distant masses of plants and flowers, mingled in ever-varying forms of beauty, are touched by the melancholy lustre of the rising moon. Nearer to the house the restful shadows are disturbed at intervals, where streams of light fall over them aslant from the lamps in the room. The fountain is playing. In rivalry with its lighter music, the nightingales are singing their song of ecstasy. Sometimes the laughter of girls is heard, and sometimes the melody of a waltz. The younger guests at Monksmoor are dancing.

Emily and Cecilia are dressed alike in white, with flowers in their hair. Francine rivals them by means of a gorgeous contrast of color, and declares that she is rich with the bright emphasis of diamonds and the soft persuasion of pearls. Miss Plym (from the rectory) is fat and fair and pros-

perous; she overflows with good spirits; she has a waist which defies tight lacing, and she dances joyously on large flat feet. Miss Darnaway (officer's daughter, with small means) is the exact opposite of Miss Plym. She is thin and tall and faded—poor soul! Destiny has made it her hard lot in life to fill the place of head nurse-maid at home. In her pensive moments she thinks of the little brothers and sisters whose patient servant she is, and wonders who comforts them in their tumbles and tells them stories at bed-time, while she is holiday-making at the pleasant country house.

Tender-hearted Cecilia, remembering how few pleasures this young friend has, and knowing how well she dances, never allows her to be without a partner. There are three invaluable young gentlemen present who are excellent dancers. Members of different families, they are nevertheless fearfully and wonderfully like each other. They present the same rosy complexions and straw-colored mustachios, the same plump cheeks, vacant eyes, and low foreheads, and they utter, with the same stolid gravity, the same imbecile small-talk. On sofas facing each other sit the two remaining guests who have not joined the elders at the card table in another room. They are both men. One of them is drowsy and middle-aged—happy in the possession of large landed property; happier still in a capacity for drinking Mr. Wyvil's famous port-wine without gouty results.

The other gentleman—ah! who is the other? He is the confidential adviser and bosom-friend of every young lady in the house. Is it necessary to name the Reverend Miles Mirabel?

There he sits enthroned, with room for a fair admirer on either side of him, the clerical sultan of a platonic harem. His persuasive ministry is felt as well as heard: he has an innocent habit of fondling young persons. One of his arms is even long enough to embrace the circumference of Miss Plym, while the other clasps the rigid silken waist of Francine. "I do it everywhere else," he says, innocently; "why not here?" Why not, indeed, with that delicate complexion and those beautiful blue eyes; with the glorious golden hair that rests on his shoulders, and the glossy beard that flows over his breast? Familiarities forbidden to mere men become privileges and condescensions when an angel enters society—and more especially when that angel has enough of mortality in him to be amusing. Mr. Mirabel, on his social side, is an irresistible companion. He is cheerfulness itself; he takes a favorable view of everything; his sweet temper never differs with anybody. "In my humble way," he confesses, "I like to make the world about me brighter." Laughter (harmlessly produced, observe) is the element in which he lives and breathes. Miss Darnaway's serious face puts him out; he has laid a bet with Emily—not in money, not even in gloves, only in flowers—that he will make Miss Darnaway laugh, and he has won the wager. Emily's flowers are in his button-hole, peeping through the curly interstices of his beard. "Must you leave me?" he asks, tenderly, when there is a dancing man at liberty, and it is Francine's turn to claim him. She leaves her seat not very willingly. For a while the place is vacant; Miss Plym seizes the opportunity of consulting the ladies' bosom-friend.

"Dear Mr. Mirabel, do tell me what you think of Miss De Sor."

Dear Mr. Mirabel bursts into enthusiasm, and makes a charming reply.

His large experience of young ladies warns him that they will tell each other what he thinks of them, when they retire for the night; and he is careful, on these occasions, to say something that will bear repetition.

"I see in Miss De Sor," he declares, "the resolution of a man, tempered by the sweetness of a woman. When that interesting creature marries, her husband will be—shall I use the vulgar word?—hen-pecked. Dear Miss Plym, he will enjoy it; and he will be quite right too; and, if I am asked to the wedding, I shall say, with heart-felt sincerity, *Enviably man!*"

In the height of her admiration of Mr. Mirabel's wonderful eye for character, Miss Plym is called away to the piano. Cecilia succeeds to her friend's place, and has her waist taken in charge as a matter of course.

"How do you like Miss Plym?" she asks.

Mr. Mirabel smiles, and shows the prettiest little pearly teeth. "I was just thinking of her," he confesses, pleasantly. "Miss Plym is so nice and plump, so comforting and domestic—such a perfect clergyman's daughter. You love her, don't you? Is she engaged to be married? In that case—between ourselves, dear Miss Wyvil, a clergyman is obliged to be cautious—I may own that I love her too."

Delicious titillations of flattered self-esteem betray themselves in Cecilia's lovely complexion. She is the chosen confidante of this irresistible man; and she would like to express her sense of obligation. But Mr. Mirabel is a master in the art of putting the right words in the right places; and simple Cecilia distrusts herself and her grammar.

At that moment of embarrassment a friend leaves the dance, and helps Cecilia out of the difficulty.

Emily approaches the sofa-throne, breathless, followed by her partner, entreating her to give him "one turn more." She is not to be tempted; she means to rest. Cecilia sees an act of mercy, suggested by the presence of the disengaged young man. She seizes his arm, and hurries him off to poor Miss Darnaway—sitting forlorn in a corner, and thinking of the nursery at home.

In the mean while a circumstance occurs. Mr. Mirabel's all-embracing arm shows itself in a new character when Emily sits by his side.

It becomes for the first time an irresolute arm. It advances a little, and hesitates. Emily at once administers an unexpected check; she insists on preserving a free waist, in her own outspoken language. "No, Mr. Mirabel; keep that for the others. You can't imagine how ridiculous you and your young ladies look, and how absurdly unaware of it you all seem to be." For the first time in his life the reverend and ready-witted man of the world is at a loss for an answer. Why?

For this simple reason. He too has felt the magnetic attraction of the irresistible little creature whom every one likes. Miss Jethro has been doubly defeated. She has failed to keep them apart, and her unexplained misgivings have not been justified by events: Emily and Mr. Mirabel are good friends already. The brilliant clergyman is poor; his interests in life point to a marriage for money; he has fascinated the heiresses of two rich fathers, Mr. Wyvil and Mr. De Sor; and yet he is conscious of an influence (an alien influence, without a balance at its banker's) which has in some mysterious way got between him and his interests.

On Emily's side the attraction felt is of another nature altogether.

Among the merry young people at Monksmoor she is her old happy self again, and she finds in Mr. Mirabel the most agreeable and amusing man whom she has ever met. After those dismal night-watches by the bed of her dying aunt, and the dreary weeks of solitude that followed, to live in this new world of luxury and gayety is like escaping from the darkness of night, and basking in the full brightness of day. Cecilia declares that she looks once more like the joyous queen of the bedroom in the by-gone time at school, and Francine (profaning Shakespeare without knowing it) says, "Emily is herself again."

"Now that your arm is in its right place, reverend sir," she gayly resumes, "I may admit that there are exceptions to all rules. My waist is at your disposal in a case of necessity—that is to say, in a case of waltzing."

"The one case of all others," Mirabel answers, with the engaging frankness that has won him so many friends, "which can never happen in my unhappy experience. Waltzing, I blush to own it, means picking me up off the floor, and putting smelling salts to my nostrils. In other words, dear Miss Emily, it is the room that waltzes—not I. I can't look at those whirling couples there with a steady head. Even the exquisite figure of our young hostess, when it describes flying circles, turns me giddy."

Hearing this allusion to Cecilia, Emily drops to the level of the other girls. She, too, pays her homage to the Pope of private life. "You promised me your unbiassed opinion of Cecilia," she reminds him; "and you haven't given it yet."

The ladies' friend gently remonstrates. "Miss Wyvil's beauty dazzles me. How can I give an unbiassed opinion? Besides, I am not thinking of her; I can only think of you."

Emily lifts her eyes, half merrily, half tenderly, and looks at him over the top of her fan. It is her first effort at flirtation. She is eager to engage in the most interesting of all games to a girl—the game which plays at making love. What had Cecilia told her, in those bedroom gossipings, dear to the hearts of the two friends? Cecilia has whispered, "Mr. Mirabel admires your figure; he calls you 'the Venus of Milo, in a state of perfect abridgment.'" Where is the daughter of Eve who would not have been flattered by that pretty compliment—who would not have talked soft nonsense in return? "You can only think of me," Emily repeats, coquetishly. "Have you said that to the last young lady who occupied my place, and will you say it again to the next who follows me?"

"Not to one of them. Mere compliments are for the others, not for you."

"What is for me, Mr. Mirabel?"

"What I have just offered to you—a confession of the truth."

Emily is startled by the tone in which he replies. He seems to be in earnest; not a vestige is left of the easy gayety of his manner. His face shows an expression of anxiety which she has never seen in it yet. "Do you believe me?" he asks, in a whisper.

She tries to change the subject. "When am I to hear you preach, Mr. Mirabel?"

He persists. "When you believe me," he says.

His eyes add an emphasis to that reply which is not to be mistaken. Emily turns away from him, and notices Francine. She has left the dance,

and is looking with marked attention at Emily and Mirabel. "I want to speak to you," she says, and beckons impatiently to Emily.

Mirabel whispers, "Don't go."

Emily rises, nevertheless, ready to avail herself of the first excuse for leaving him. Francine meets her half-way, and takes her by the arm.

"What is it?" Emily asks.

"Suppose you leave off flirting with Mr. Mirabel, and make yourself of some use."

"In what way?"

"Use your ears—and look at that girl."

She points disdainfully to innocent Miss Plym. The rector's daughter possesses all the virtues, with one exception—the virtue of having an ear for music. When she sings, she is out of tune, and when she plays, she murders time.

"Who can dance to such music as that?" says Francine. "Finish the waltz for her."

Emily naturally hesitates. "How can I take her place unless she asks me?"

Francine laughs scornfully. "Say at once you want to go back to Mr. Mirabel."

"Do you think I should have got up when you beckoned to me," Emily sharply rejoins, "if I had not wanted to get away from Mr. Mirabel?"

Instead of resenting this sharp retort, Francine suddenly breaks into good humor. "Come along, you little spitfire, I'll manage it for you."

She leads Emily to the piano, and stops Miss Plym without a word of apology. "It's your turn to dance now. Here's Miss Brown waiting to relieve you."

Cecilia has not been unobservant, in her own quiet way, of what has been going on. Waiting until Francine and Miss Plym are out of hearing she bends over Emily and says, "My dear, I really do think Francine is in love with Mr. Mirabel."

"After having only been a week in the same house with him!" Emily exclaims.

"At any rate," says Cecilia, more smartly than usual, "she is jealous of you."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FEIGNING.

THE next morning Mr. Mirabel took two members of the circle at Monks-moor by surprise. One of them was Emily, and one of them was the master of the house.

Seeing Emily alone in the garden before breakfast, he left his room and joined her. "Let me say one word," he pleaded, "before we go in to breakfast. I am grieved to think that I was so unfortunate as to offend you last night."

Emily's look of astonishment answered for her before she could speak. "What can I have said or done," she asked, "to make you think that?"

"Now I breathe again!" he cried, with the boyish gayety of manner which was one of the secrets of his popularity among women. "I really

fell into the mistake quite naturally. It is a terrible confession for a clergyman to make, but it is not the less true that I am one of the most indiscreet men living. It is my rock ahead in life that I say the first thing which comes uppermost without stopping to think. Being well aware of my own defects, I naturally distrust myself."

"Even in the pulpit?" Emily inquired.

He laughed with the readiest appreciation of the satire, although it was directed against himself.

"I like that question," he said; "it tells me we are as good friends again as ever. The fact is, the sight of the congregation, when I get into the pulpit, has the same effect upon me that the sight of the foot-lights has on an actor. All oratory (though my clerical brethren are shy of confessing it) is acting—without the scenery and the costumes. Did you really mean it last night when you said you would like to hear me preach?"

"Indeed I did."

"How very kind of you! I don't think myself the sermon is worth the sacrifice. (There is another specimen of my indiscreet way of talking.) What I mean is that you will have to get up early on Sunday morning, and drive twelve miles to the damp and dismal little village in which I officiate for a man with a rich wife who likes the climate of Italy. My congregation works in the fields all the week, and naturally enough goes to sleep in church on Sunday. I have had to counteract that. Not by preaching. I wouldn't puzzle the poor people with my eloquence for the world. No, no; I tell them little stories out of the Bible, in a nice, easy, gossiping way. A quarter of an hour is my limit of time; and, I am proud to say, some of them (mostly the women) do to a certain extent keep awake. If you and the other ladies decide to honor me, it is needless to say you shall have one of my grand efforts. What will be the effect on my unfortunate flock remains to be seen. I will have the church brushed up, and luncheon of course at the parsonage. Beans, bacon, and beer—I haven't got anything else in the house. Are you rich? I hope not."

"I suspect I am quite as poor as you are, Mr. Mirabel."

"I am delighted to hear it. (More of my indiscretion.) Our poverty is another bond between us."

Before he could enlarge on this text the breakfast bell rang.

He gave Emily his arm, quite satisfied with the result of the morning's talk. In speaking seriously to her on the previous night, he had committed the mistake of speaking too soon. To amend this false step, and to recover his position in Emily's estimation, had been his object in view—and it had been successfully accomplished. At the breakfast table that morning the companionable clergyman was more amusing than ever.

The meal being over, the company dispersed as usual, with the one exception of Mirabel. Without any apparent reason, he kept his place at the table. Mr. Wyril, the most courteous and considerate of men, felt it an attention due to his guest not to leave the room first. All that he could venture to do was to give a little hint. "Have you any plans for the morning?" he asked.

"I have a plan that depends entirely on yourself," Mirabel answered; "and I am afraid of being as indiscreet as usual, if I mention it. Your charming daughter tells me you play on the violin."

Modest Mr. Wyvil looked confused. "I hope you have not been annoyed," he said; "I practice in a distant room so that nobody may hear me."

"My dear sir, I am eager to hear you! Music is my passion; and the violin is my favorite instrument."

Mr. Wyvil led the way to his room, positively blushing with pleasure. Since the death of his wife he had been sadly in want of a little encouragement. His daughters and his friends were careful—overcareful, as he thought—of intruding on him in his hours of practice. And, sad to say, his daughters and his friends were, from a musical point of view, perfectly right.

Literature has hardly paid sufficient attention to a social phenomenon of a singularly perplexing kind. We hear enough, and more than enough, of persons who successfully cultivate the arts, of the remarkable manner in which fitness for their vocation shows itself in early life, of the obstacles which family prejudice places in their way, and of the unremitting devotion which has led to the achievement of glorious results.

But how many writers have noticed those other incomprehensible persons, members of families innocent for generations past of practicing art, or caring for art, who have notwithstanding displayed from their earliest years the irresistible desire to cultivate poetry, painting, or music, who have surmounted obstacles and endured disappointments in the single-hearted resolution to devote their lives to an intellectual pursuit, being absolutely without the capacity which proves the vocation and justifies the sacrifice? Here is Nature, "unerring Nature," presented in flat contradiction with herself. Here are men bent on performing feats of running, without having legs; and women, hopelessly barren, living in constant expectation of large families to the end of their days! The musician is not to be found more completely deprived than Mr. Wyvil of natural capacity for playing on an instrument—and for twenty years past it had been the pride and delight of his heart to let no day of his life go by without practicing on the violin.

"I am sure I must be tiring you," he said, politely, after having played without mercy for an hour and more.

No: the insatiable amateur had his own purpose to gain, and was not exhausted yet. Mr. Wyvil got up to look for some more music. In that interval desultory conversation naturally took place. Mirabel contrived to give it the necessary direction—the direction of Emily.

"The most delightful girl I have met with for many a long year past," Mr. Wyvil declared, warmly. "I don't wonder at my daughter being so fond of her. She leads a solitary life at home, poor thing; and I am honestly glad to see her spirits reviving in my house."

"An only child?" Mirabel asked.

In the necessary explanations that followed, Emily's isolated position in the world was revealed in few words. But one more discovery—the most important of all—remained to be made. Had she used a figure of speech in saying that she was as poor as Mirabel himself, or had she told him the shocking truth? He put the question with perfect delicacy, but with unerring directness as well.

Mr. Wyvil, quoting his daughter's authority, described Emily's income as falling short even of two hundred a year. Having made that dishearten-

ing reply, he opened another music-book. "You know this sonata, of course?" he said. The next moment the violin was under his chin, and the performance began.

While Mirabel was, to all appearance, listening with the utmost attention, he was actually endeavoring to reconcile himself to a serious sacrifice of his own inclinations. If he remained much longer in the same house with Emily, the impression that she had produced on him would be certainly strengthened, and he would be guilty of the folly of making an offer of marriage to a woman who was as poor as himself. The one remedy that could be trusted to preserve him from such infatuation as this was absence. At the end of the week he had arranged to return to Vale Regis for his Sunday duty, engaging to join his friends again at Monkmoor on the Monday following. That rash promise, there could be no further doubt about it, must not be fulfilled.

He had arrived at this resolution when the terrible activity of Mr. Wyvil's bow was suspended by the appearance of a third person in the room.

Cecilia's maid was charged with a neat little three-cornered note from her young lady to be presented to her master. Wondering why his daughter should write to him, Mr. Wyvil opened the note, and was informed of Cecilia's motives in these words:

"DEAREST PAPA,—I hear Mr. Mirabel is with you, and as this is a secret, I must write. Emily has received a very strange letter this morning, which puzzles her and alarms me. When you are quite at liberty, we shall be so much obliged if you will tell us how Emily ought to answer it."

Mr. Wyvil stopped Mirabel on the point of trying to escape from the music. "A little domestic matter to attend to," he said. "But we will finish the sonata first."

CHAPTER XL

CONSULTING.

OUT of the music-room, and away from his violin, the sound side of Mr. Wyvil's character was free to assert itself. In his public and in his private capacity he was an eminently sensible man.

As a Member of Parliament, he set an example which might have been followed with advantage by many of his colleagues. In the first place, he abstained from hastening the downfall of representative institutions by asking questions and making speeches. In the second place, he was able to distinguish between the duty that he owed to his party and the duty that he owed to his country. When the legislature acted politically—that is to say, when it dealt with foreign complications, or electoral reforms—he followed his leader. When the legislature acted socially—that is to say, for the good of the people—he followed his conscience. On the last occasion when the great Russian bugbear provoked a division, he voted submissively with his Conservative allies. But when the question of opening museums and picture-galleries on Sundays arrayed the two parties in hostile camps, he broke into open mutiny, and went over to the Liberals. He consented to help in preventing an extension of the franchise; but he re-

fused to be concerned in obstructing the repeal of taxes on knowledge. "I am doubtful in the first case," he said, "but I am sure in the second." He was asked for an explanation: "Doubtful of what? and sure of what?" To the astonishment of his leader he answered, "The benefit to the people." The same sound sense appeared in the transactions of his private life. Lazy and dishonest servants found that the gentlest of masters had a side to his character which took them by surprise. And, on certain occasions in the experience of Cecilia and her sister, the most indulgent of fathers proved to be as capable of saying No as the sternest tyrant who ever ruled a fireside.

Called into council by his daughter and his guest, Mr. Wyvil assisted them by advice which was equally wise and kind, but which afterward led, under the perverse influence of circumstances, to deplorable results.

The letter to Emily which Cecilia had recommended to her father's consideration had come from Netherwoods, and had been written by Alban Morris.

He assured Emily that he had only decided on writing to her, after some hesitation, in hope of serving interests which he did not himself understand, but which might prove to be interests worthy of consideration, nevertheless. Having stated his motive in these terms, he proceeded to relate what had passed between Miss Jethro and himself, concealing, for obvious reasons, the farewell words in which she had so strangely alluded to the memory of Emily's father. On the subject of Francine, Alban only ventured to add that she had not produced a favorable impression on him, and that he could not think her likely, on further experience, to prove a desirable friend.

On the last leaf were added some lines which Emily was at no loss how to answer. She had folded back the page, so that no eyes but her own should see how the poor drawing master finished his letter. "I wish you all possible happiness, my dear, among your new friends; but don't forget the old friend who thinks of you, and dreams of you, and longs to see you again. The little world I live in is a dreary world, Emily, in your absence. Will you write to me now and then, and encourage me to hope?"

Mr. Wyvil smiled as he looked at the folded page which hid the signature.

"I suppose I may take it for granted," he said, slyly, "that this gentleman really has your interests at heart? May I know who he is?"

Emily answered the last question readily enough. Mr. Wyvil went on with his inquiries. "About the mysterious lady with the strange name," he proceeded—"do you know anything of her?"

Emily related what she knew, without revealing the true reason for Miss Jethro's departure from Netherwoods. In after-years it was one of her most treasured remembrances that she had kept secret the melancholy confession which had startled her on the last night of her life at school.

Mr. Wyvil looked at Alban's letter again. "Do you know how Miss Jethro became acquainted with Mr. Mirabel?" he asked.

"I didn't even know that they were acquainted."

"Do you think it likely, if Mr. Morris had been talking to you instead of writing to you, that he might have said more than he has said in his letter?"

Cecilia had hitherto remained a model of discretion. Seeing Emily hesitate, temptation overcame her. "Not a doubt of it, papa," she declared, confidently.

"Is Cecilia right?" Mr. Wyvil inquired.

Reminded in this way of her influence over Alban, Emily could only make one honest reply. She admitted that Cecilia was right.

Mr. Wyvil thereupon advised her not to express any opinion until she was in a better position to judge for herself. "When you write to Mr. Morris," he continued, "say that you will wait to tell him what you think of Miss Jethro until you see him again."

"I have no prospect at present of seeing him again," Emily said.

"You can see Mr. Morris whenever it suits him to come here," Mr. Wyvil replied. "I will write and ask him to visit us, and you can inclose the invitation in your letter."

"Oh, Mr. Wyvil, how good of you!"

"Oh, papa, the very thing I was going to ask you to do!"

The excellent master of Monksmoor looked unaffectedly surprised. "What are you two young ladies making a fuss about?" he said. "Mr. Morris is a gentleman by profession, and—may I venture to say it, Miss Emily?—a valued friend of yours as well. Who has a better claim to be one of my guests?"

Cecilia stopped her father as he was about to leave the room. "I suppose we mustn't ask Mr. Mirabel what he knows of Miss Jethro?" she said.

"My dear, what can you be thinking of? What right have we to question Mr. Mirabel about Miss Jethro?"

"It's so very unsatisfactory, papa. There must be some reason why Emily and Mr. Mirabel ought not to meet, or why should Miss Jethro have been so very earnest about it?"

"Miss Jethro doesn't intend us to know why, Cecilia. It will perhaps come out in time. Wait for time."

Left together, the girls discussed the course which Alban would probably take on receiving Mr. Wyvil's invitation.

"He will only be too glad," Cecilia asserted, "to have the opportunity of seeing you again."

"I doubt whether he will care about seeing me again among strangers," Emily replied. "And you forget that there are obstacles in his way. How is he to leave his class?"

"Quite easily. His class doesn't meet on the Saturday half-holiday. He can be here if he starts early, in time for luncheon, and he can stay till Monday or Tuesday."

"Who is to take his place at the school?"

"Miss Ladd, to be sure—if *you* make a point of it. Write to her as well as to Mr. Morris."

The letters being written, and the order having been given to prepare a room for the expected guest, Emily and Cecilia returned to the drawing-room. They found the elders of the party variously engaged, the men with newspapers, and the ladies with work. Entering the conservatory next, they discovered Cecilia's sister languishing among the flowers in an easy-chair. Constitutional laziness in some young ladies assumes an invalid character, and presents the interesting spectacle of perpetual con-

valescence. The doctor declared that the baths at St. Moritz had cured Miss Julia. Miss Julia declined to agree with the doctor.

"Come into the garden with Emily and me," Cecilia said.

"Emily and you don't know what it is to be ill," Julia answered.

The two girls left her, and joined the young people who were amusing themselves in the garden. Francine had taken possession of Mirabel, and had condemned him to hard labor in swinging her. He made an attempt to get away when Emily and Cecilia approached, and was peremptorily recalled to his duty. "Higher!" cried Miss De Sor, in her hardest tones of authority. "I want to swing higher than anybody else." Mirabel submitted with gentleman-like resignation, and was rewarded by tender encouragement expressed in a look.

"Do you see that?" Cecilia whispered. "He knows how rich she is. I wonder whether he will marry her?"

Emily smiled. "I doubt it, while he is in this house," she said. "You are as rich as Francine—and don't forget that you have other attractions as well."

Cecilia shook her head. "Mr. Mirabel is very nice," she admitted, "but I wouldn't marry him. Would you?"

Emily secretly compared Alban with Mirabel. "Not for the world," she answered.

The next day was the day of Mirabel's departure. His admirers among the ladies followed him out to the door, at which Mr. Wyvil's carriage was waiting. Francine threw a nosegay after the departing guest as he got in. "Mind you come back to us on Monday," she said. Mirabel bowed and thanked her; but his last look was for Emily, standing apart from the others at the top of the steps. Francine said nothing. Her lips closed convulsively; she turned pale.

CHAPTER XLI.

SPEECHIFYING.

On the Monday a ploughboy from Vale Regis arrived at Monksmoor.

In respect of himself, he was a person beneath notice; in respect of his errand, he was sufficiently important to cast a gloom over the household. The faithless Mirabel had broken his engagement, and the ploughboy was the herald of misfortune who brought his apology. To his great disappointment, he wrote, he was detained by the affairs of his parish. He could only trust to Mr. Wyvil's indulgence to excuse him, and to communicate his sincere sense of regret (on scented note-paper) to the ladies.

Everybody believed in the affairs of the parish, with the exception of Francine. "Mr. Mirabel has made the best excuse he could think of for shortening his visit; and I don't wonder at it," she said, looking significantly at Emily.

Emily was playing with one of the dogs; exercising him in the tricks which he had learned. She balanced a morsel of sugar on his nose, and had no attention to spare for Francine.

Cecilia, as the mistress of the house, felt it her duty to interfere. "That is a strange remark to make," she answered. "Do you mean to say that we have driven Mr. Mirabel away from us?"

"I accuse nobody," Francine began, with spiteful candor.

"Now she's going to accuse everybody!" Emily interposed, addressing herself facetiously to the dog.

"But when girls are bent on fascinating men, whether they like it or not," Francine proceeded, "men have only one alternative—they must keep out of the way." She looked again at Emily more pointedly than ever.

Even gentle Cecilia resented this. "Whom do you refer to?" she said, sharply.

"My dear," Emily remonstrated, "need you ask?" She glanced at Francine as she spoke, and then gave the dog his signal. He tossed up the sugar and caught it in his mouth. His audience applauded him—and so for that time the skirmish ended.

Among the letters of the next morning's delivery arrived Alban's reply. Emily's anticipations proved to be correct. The drawing master's duties would not permit him to leave Netherwoods; and he, like Mirabel, sent his apologies. His short letter to Emily contained no further allusion to Miss Jethro: it began and ended on the first page.

Had he been disappointed by the tone of reserve in which Emily had written to him, under Mr. Wyvil's advice? Or (as Cecilia suggested) had his detention at the school so bitterly disappointed him that he was too disheartened to write at any length? Emily made no attempt to arrive at a conclusion either one way or the other. She seemed to be in depressed spirits; and she spoke superstitiously, for the first time in Cecilia's experience of her.

"I don't like this re-appearance of Miss Jethro," she said. "If the mystery about that woman is ever cleared up, it will bring trouble and sorrow to me—and I believe in his own secret heart Alban Morris thinks so too."

"Write and ask him," Cecilia suggested.

"He is so kind, and so unwilling to distress me," Emily answered, "that he wouldn't acknowledge it even if I am right."

In the middle of the week the course of private life at Monksmoor suffered an interruption, due to the Parliamentary position of the master of the house.

The insatiable appetite for making and hearing speeches, which represents one of the marked peculiarities of the English race (including their cousins in the United States), had seized on Mr. Wyvil's constituents. There was to be a political meeting at the market hall in the neighboring town, and the Member was expected to make an oration, passing in review contemporary events at home and abroad. "Pray don't think of accompanying me," the good man said to his guests. "The hall is badly ventilated, and the speeches, including my own, will not be worth hearing."

This humane warning was ungratefully disregarded. The gentlemen were all interested in "the objects of the meeting," and the ladies were firm in the resolution not to be left at home by themselves. They dressed with a view to the large assembly of spectators before whom they were about to appear, and they outtalked the men on political subjects all the way to the town.

The most delightful of surprises was in store for them when they reached the market hall. Among the crowd of ordinary gentlemen waiting un-

der the portico until the proceedings began appeared one person of distinction, whose title was "Reverend," and whose name was Mirabel.

Francine was the first to discover him. She darted up the steps, and held out her hand.

"This is a pleasure!" she cried. "Have you come here to see—" she was about to say me, but observing the strangers round her, altered the word to us. "Please give me your arm," she whispered, before her young friends had arrived within hearing, "I am so frightened in a crowd!"

She held fast by Mirabel, and kept a jealous watch on him. Was it only her fancy, or did she detect a new charm in his smile when he spoke to Emily?

Before it was possible to decide, the time for the meeting had arrived. Mr. Wyvil's friends were of course accommodated with seats on the platform. Francine, still insisting on her claim to Mirabel's arm, got a chair next to him. As she seated herself, she left him free for a moment. In that moment the infatuated man took an empty chair on the other side of him and placed it for Emily. He communicated to that hated rival the information which he ought to have reserved for Francine. "The committee insist," he said, "on my proposing one of the resolutions. I promise not to bore you; mine shall be the shortest speech delivered at the meeting."

The proceedings began.

Among the earlier speakers not one was inspired by a feeling of mercy for the audience. The chairman revelled in words. The mover and seconder of the first resolution (not having so much as the ghost of an idea to trouble either of them) poured out language in flowing and overflowing streams, like water from a perpetual spring. The heat exhaled by the crowded audience was already becoming insufferable. Cries of "Sit down!" assailed the orator of the moment. The chairman was obliged to interfere. A man at the back of the hall roared out "Ventilation!" and broke a window with his stick. He was rewarded with three rounds of cheers, and was ironically invited to mount the platform and take the chair.

Under these embarrassing circumstances, Mirabel rose to speak.

He secured silence, at the outset, by a humorous allusion to the prolix speaker who had preceded him. "Look at the clock, gentlemen," he said, "and limit my speech to an interval of ten minutes." The applause which followed was heard, through the broken window, in the street. The boys among the mob outside intercepted the flow of air by climbing on each other's shoulders, and looking in at the meeting through the gaps left by the shattered glass. Having proposed his resolution with discreet brevity of speech, Mirabel courted popularity on the plan adopted by the late Lord Palmerston in the House of Commons—he told stories, and made jokes, adapted to the intelligence of the dullest people who were listening to him. The charm of his voice and manner completed his success. Punctually at the tenth minute he sat down, amid cries of "Go on." Francine was the first to take his hand, and to express admiration mutely by pressing it. He returned the pressure, but he looked at the wrong lady—the lady on the other side.

Although she made no complaint, he instantly saw that Emily was over-

come by the heat. Her lips were white, and her eyes were closing. "Let me take you out," he said, "or you will faint."

Francine started to her feet to follow them. The lower order of the audience, eager for amusement, put their own humorous construction on the young lady's action. They roared with laughter. "Let the parson and his sweetheart be," they called out; "two's company, miss, and three isn't." Mr. Wyvil interposed his authority, and rebuked them. A lady seated behind Francine interfered to good purpose by giving her a chair which placed her out of sight of the audience. Order was restored, and the proceedings were resumed.

When the meeting was over, and they met again at the door, Mr. Wyvil innocently added fuel to the fire that was burning in Francine. He insisted that Mirabel should return to Monksmoor, and offered him a seat in the carriage at Emily's side.

Later in the evening, when they all met at dinner, there appeared a change in Miss De Sor which surprised everybody but Mirabel. She was gay and good-humored, and especially amiable and attentive to Emily, who sat opposite to her at the table. "What did you and Mr. Mirabel talk about while you were away from us?" she asked, innocently. "Politics?"

Emily readily adopted Francine's friendly tone. "Guess again!" she said, gayly.

"I can only guess that you had the most delightful of companions," Francine rejoined; "and I wish I had been overcome by the heat too!"

Mirabel—attentively observing her—acknowledged the compliment by a bow, and left Emily to continue the conversation. In perfect good faith she owned to having led Mirabel to talk of himself. She had heard from Cecilia that his early life had been devoted to various occupations, and she was interested in knowing how circumstances had led him into devoting himself to the Church. Francine listened with the outward appearance of implicit belief, and with the inward conviction that Emily was deliberately deceiving her. When the little narrative was at an end, she was more agreeable than ever. She admired Emily's dress, and she rivalled Cecilia in enjoyment of the good things on the table; she entertained Mirabel with humorous anecdotes of the priests at San Domingo, and was so interested in the manufacture of violins, ancient and modern, that Mr. Wyvil promised to show her his famous collection of instruments, after dinner. Her overflowing amiability included even poor Miss Darnaway, and the absent brothers and sisters. She heard, with flattering sympathy, how they had been ill, and had got well again; what amusing tricks they played, and what alarming accidents had happened to them, and how remarkably clever they were—"including, I do assure you, dear Miss De Sor, the baby only ten months old." When the ladies rose to retire, Francine was, socially speaking, the heroine of the evening.

While the violins were in course of exhibition, Mirabel found an opportunity of speaking to Emily unobserved.

"Have you said or done anything to offend Miss De Sor?" he asked.

"Nothing whatever," Emily declared, startled by the question. "What makes you think I have offended her?"

"I have been trying to find a reason for the change in her," Mirabel answered, "especially the change toward yourself."

"Well?"

"Well—she means mischief."

"Mischief of what sort?"

"Of a sort which may expose her to discovery, unless she disarms suspicion at the outset. That is exactly what she has been doing this evening. She has impressed us all favorably, and she has been particularly friendly toward you—with what object you now know. I needn't warn you to be on your guard."

All the next day Emily was on the watch for events, and nothing happened. Not the slightest appearance of jealousy betrayed itself in Francine. She made no attempt to attract to herself the attentions of Mirabel; and she showed no hostility to Emily, either by word, look, or manner.

The day after, an event occurred at Netherwoods. Alban Morris received an anonymous letter addressed to him in these terms:

"A certain young lady, in whom you are supposed to be interested, is forgetting you in your absence. If you are not mean enough to allow yourself to be supplanted by another man, join the party at Monksmoor before it is too late."

CHAPTER XLII.

COOKING.

The day after the political meeting was a day of departures at the pleasant country house.

Miss Darnaway was recalled to the nursery at home. The old squire who did justice to Mr. Wyvil's port-wine went away next, having guests to entertain at his own house. A far more serious loss followed. The three dancing men had engagements which drew them to new spheres of activity in other drawing-rooms. They said, with the same dreary grace of manner, "Very sorry to go;" they drove to the railway, arrayed in the same perfect travelling suits of neutral tint; and they had but one difference of opinion among them—each firmly believed that he was smoking the best cigar to be got in London.

The morning after these departures would have been a dull morning indeed, but for the presence of Mirabel.

When breakfast was over, the invalid Miss Julia established herself on a sofa with a novel. Her father retired to the other end of the house, and profaned the art of music on music's most expressive instrument. Left with Emily, Cecilia, and Francine, Mirabel made one of his happy suggestions. "We are thrown on our own resources," he said. "Let us distinguish ourselves by inventing some entirely new amusement for the day. You young ladies shall sit in council, and I will be secretary." He turned to Cecilia. "The meeting waits to hear the mistress of the house."

Modest Cecilia appealed to her school friends for help, addressing herself in the first instance (by the secretary's advice) to Francine, as the eldest. They all noticed another change in this variable young person. She was silent and subdued, and she said, wearily, "I don't care what we do; shall we go out riding?"

The unanswerable objection to riding as a form of amusement was that it had been more than once tried already. Something clever and surprising was anticipated from Emily when it came to her turn. She, too, disappointed expectation. "Let us sit under the trees," was all she could suggest, "and ask Mr. Mirabel to tell us a story."

Mirabel laid down his pen, and took it on himself to reject this proposal. "Remember," he remonstrated, "that I have an interest in the diversions of the day. You can't expect me to be amused by my own story. I appeal to Miss Wyvil to invent a pleasure which will include the secretary."

Cecilia blushed and looked uneasy. "I think I have got an idea," she announced, after some hesitation. "May I propose that we all go to the keeper's lodge?" There her courage failed her, and she hesitated again.

Mirabel gravely registered the proposal, as far as it went. "What are we to do," he inquired, "when we get to the keeper's lodge?"

"We are to ask the keeper's wife," Cecilia proceeded, "to lend us her kitchen."

"To lend us her kitchen," Mirabel repeated. "And what are we to do in the kitchen?"

Cecilia looked down bashfully at her pretty hands crossed on her lap, and answered, softly,

"Cook our own luncheon."

Here was an entirely new amusement, in the most attractive sense of the word! Here was charming Cecilia's interest in the pleasures of the fable so happily inspired, that the grateful meeting offered its tribute of applause, even including Francine. The members of the council were young; their daring digestions contemplated without fear the prospect of eating their own amateur cookery. The one question that troubled them now was what they were to cook.

"I can make an omelet," Cecilia ventured to say.

"If there is any cold chicken to be had," Emily added, "I undertake to follow the omelet with a mayonnaise."

"There are clergymen in the Church of England who are even clever enough to fry potatoes," Mirabel announced—"and I am one of them. What shall we have next? A pudding? Miss De Sor, can you make a pudding?"

Francine exhibited another new side to her character—a diffident and humble side. "I am ashamed to say I don't know how to cook anything," she confessed. "You had better leave me out of it."

But Cecilia was now in her element. Her plan of operations was wide enough even to include Francine. "You shall wash the lettuce, my dear, and stone the olives for Emily's mayonnaise. Don't be discouraged! You shall have a companion; we will send to the rectory for Miss Plym—the very person to chop parsley and shallot for my omelet. Oh, Emily, what a morning we are going to have!" Her lovely blue eyes sparkled with joy; she gave Emily a kiss which Mirabel must have been more or less than man not to have coveted. "I'm so excited," cried Cecilia, completely
 1. "I don't know what to do with myself!"

of her friend applied the right remedy.
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Cecilia instantly recovered her presence of mind. She sat down at the writing-table, and made out a list of eatable productions in the animal and vegetable world, in which every other word was underlined two or three times over. Her serious face was a sight to see when she rang for the cook, and the two held a privy council in a corner.

On the way to the keeper's lodge, the young mistress of the house headed a procession of servants carrying the materials. Francine followed, held in custody by Miss Plym—who took her responsibilities seriously, and clamored for instruction in the art of chopping parsley. Mirabel and Emily were together, far behind; they were the only two members of the company whose minds were not occupied in one way or another by the kitchen.

"This child's play of ours doesn't seem to interest you," Mirabel remarked.

"I am thinking," Emily answered, "of what you said to me about Francine."

"I can say something more," he rejoined. "When I noticed the change in her at dinner, I told you she meant mischief. There is another change to-day, which suggests to my mind that the mischief is done."

"And directed against me?" Emily asked.

Mirabel made no direct reply. It was impossible for *him* to remind her that she had, no matter how innocently, exposed herself to the jealous hatred of Francine. "Time will tell us what we don't know now," he replied, evasively.

"You seem to have faith in time, Mr. Mirabel."

"The greatest faith. Time is the inveterate enemy of deceit. Sooner or later every hidden thing is a thing doomed to discovery."

"Without exception?"

"Yes," he answered, positively, "without exception."

At that moment Francine stopped and looked back at them. Did she think that Emily and Mirabel had been talking together long enough? Miss Plym—with the parsley still on her mind—advanced to consult Emily's experience. The two walked on together, leaving Mirabel to overtake Francine. He saw, in her first look at him, the effort that it cost her to suppress those emotions which the pride of women is most deeply interested in concealing. Before a word had passed he regretted that Emily had left them together.

"I wish I had your cheerful disposition," she began, abruptly. "I am out of spirits, or out of temper—I don't know which—and I don't know why. Do you ever trouble yourself with thinking of the future?"

"As seldom as possible, Miss De Sor. In such a situation as mine most people have prospects—I have none."

He spoke gravely, conscious of not feeling at ease on his side. If he had been the most modest man that ever lived, he must have seen in Francine's face that she loved him.

When they had first been presented to each other she was still under the influence of the meanest instincts in her scheming and selfish nature. She had thought to herself, "With my money to help him, that man's celebrity would do the rest; the best society in England would be glad to receive Mirabel's wife."

As the days passed, strong feeling had taken the place of those contemptible aspirations: Mirabel had unconsciously inspired the one passion which was powerful enough to master Francine—sensual passion. Wild hopes rioted in her. Measureless desires which she had never felt before united themselves with capacities for wickedness, which had been the horrid growth of a few nights—capacities which suggested even viler attempts to rid herself of a supposed rivalry than slandering Emily by means of an anonymous letter. Without waiting for it to be offered she took Mirabel's arm and pressed it to her breast as they slowly walked on. The fear of discovery which had troubled her after she had sent her base letter to the post vanished at that inspiring moment. She bent her head near enough to him when he spoke to feel his breath on her face.

"There is a strange similarity," she said, softly, "between your position and mine. Is there anything cheering in *my* prospects? I am far away from home—my father and mother wouldn't care if they never saw me again. People talk about my money! What is the use of money to such a lonely wretch as I am? Suppose I write to London, and ask the lawyer if I may give it all away to some deserving person? Why not to you?"

"My dear Miss De Sor—!"

"Is there anything wrong, Mr. Mirabel, in wishing that I could make you a prosperous man?"

"You must not even talk of such a thing!"

"How proud you are!" she said, submissively. "Oh, I can't bear to think of you in that miserable village—a position so unworthy of your talents and your claims! And you tell me I must not talk about it. Would you have said that to Emily if she was as anxious as I am to see you in your right place in the world?"

"I should have answered her exactly as I have answered you."

"She will never embarrass you, Mr. Mirabel, by being as sincere as I am. Emily can keep her own secrets."

"Is she to blame for doing that?"

"It depends on your feeling for her."

"What feeling do you mean?"

"Suppose you heard she was engaged to be married?" Francine suggested.

Mirabel's manner—studiously cold and formal thus far—altered on a sudden. He looked with unconcealed anxiety at Francine. "Do you say that seriously?" he asked.

"I said, 'Suppose.' I don't exactly know that she is engaged."

"What *do* you know?"

"Oh, how interested you are in Emily! She is admired by some people. Are you one of them?"

Mirabel's experience of women warned him to try silence as a means of provoking her into speaking plainly. The experiment succeeded. Francine returned to the question that he had put to her, and abruptly answered it:

"You may believe me or not, as you like—I know of a man who is in love with her. He has had his opportunities, and he has made good use of them. Would you like to know who he is?"

"I should like to know anything which you may wish to tell me." He did his best to make the reply in a tone of commonplace politeness—and he might have succeeded in deceiving a man. The woman's quicker ear told her that he was angry. Francine took the full advantage of that change in her favor.

"I am afraid your good opinion of Emily will be shaken," she quietly resumed, "when I tell you that she has encouraged a man who is only drawing master at a school. At the same time, a person in her circumstances—I mean she has no money—ought not to be very hard to please. Of course she has never spoken to you of Mr. Alban Morris?"

"Not that I remember."

Only four words—but they satisfied Francine.

The one thing wanting to complete the obstacle which she had now placed in Emily's way was that Alban Morris should enter on the scene. He might hesitate; but if he was really fond of Emily, the anonymous letter would sooner or later bring him to Monksmoor. In the mean time her object was gained. She dropped Mirabel's arm.

"Here is the lodge," she said, gayly. "I declare, Cecilia has got an apron on already! Come, and cook."

CHAPTER XLIII.

SOUNDING.

MIRABEL left Francine to enter the lodge by herself. His mind was disturbed: he felt the importance of gaining time for reflection before he and Emily met again.

The keeper's garden was at the back of the lodge. Passing through the wicket-gate he found a little summer-house at a turn in the path. No-body was there: he went in and sat down.

At intervals he had even yet encouraged himself to underrate the true importance of the feeling which Emily had awakened in him. There was an end to all self-deception now. After what Francine had said to him, this shallow and frivolous man no longer resisted the all-absorbing influence of love. He shrank under the one terrible question that forced itself on his mind: Had that jealous girl spoken the truth?

In what process of investigation could he trust to set this anxiety at rest? To apply openly to Emily would be to take a liberty which Emily was the last person in the world to permit. In his recent intercourse with her he had felt more strongly than ever the importance of speaking with reserve. He had been scrupulously careful to take no unfair advantage of his opportunity when he had removed her from the meeting, and when they had walked together, with hardly a creature to observe them, in the lonely outskirts of the town. Emily's gayety and good-humor had not led him astray: he knew that these were bad signs viewed in the interests of love. His one hope of touching her deeper sympathies was to wait for the help that might yet come from time and chance. With a bitter sigh he resigned himself to the necessity of being as agreeable and amusing as ever: it was just possible that he might lure her into alluding to Alban Morris if he began innocently by making her laugh.

As he rose to return to the lodge, the keeper's little terrier, prowling

about the garden, looked into the summer-house. Seeing a stranger, the dog showed his teeth and growled.

Mirabel shrank back against the wall behind him, trembling in every limb. His eyes stared in terror as the dog came nearer, barking in high triumph over the discovery of a frightened man whom he could bully. Mirabel called out for help. A laborer at work in the garden ran to the place, and stopped with a broad grin of amusement at seeing a grown man terrified by a barking dog. "Well," he said to himself, after Mirabel had passed out under protection, "there goes a coward if ever there was one yet."

Mirabel waited a minute behind the lodge to recover himself. He had been so completely unnerved that his hair was wet with perspiration. While he used his handkerchief, he shuddered at other recollections than the recollection of the dog. "After that night at the inn," he thought, "the least thing frightens me."

He was received by the young ladies with cries of derisive welcome. "Oh, for shame! for shame! here are the potatoes already cut, and nobody to fry them!"

Mirabel assumed the mask of cheerfulness—with the desperate resolution of an actor amusing his audience at a time of domestic distress. He astonished the keeper's wife by showing that he really knew how to use her frying-pan. Cecilia's omelet was tough—but the young ladies ate it. Emily's mayonnaise sauce was almost as liquid as water—they swallowed it nevertheless, by the help of spoons. The potatoes followed, crisp and dry and delicious—and Mirabel became more popular than ever. "He is the only one of us," Cecilia sadly acknowledged, "who knows how to cook."

When they all left the lodge for a stroll in the park, Francine attached herself to Cecilia and Miss Plym. She resigned Mirabel to Emily, in the happy belief that she had paved the way for a misunderstanding between them.

The merriment at the luncheon table had revived Emily's good spirits. She had a light-hearted remembrance of the failure of her sauce. Mirabel saw her smiling to herself. "May I ask what amuses you?" he said.

"I was thinking of the debt of gratitude that we owe to Mr. Wyvil," she replied. "If he had not persuaded you to return to Mouksmoor, we should never have seen the famous Mr. Mirabel with a frying-pan in his hand, and never have tasted the only good dish at our luncheon."

Mirabel tried vainly to adopt his companion's easy tone. Now that he was alone with her, the doubts that Francine had aroused shook the prudent resolution at which he had arrived in the garden. He ran the risk, and told Emily plainly why he had returned to Mr. Wyvil's house.

"Although I am sensible of our host's kindness," he answered, "I should have gone back to my parsonage—but for You."

She declined to understand him seriously. "Then the affairs of your parish are neglected, and I am to blame," she said.

"Am I the first man who has neglected his duties for your sake?" he asked. "I wonder whether the masters at school had the heart to report you when you neglected your lessons?"

She thought of Alban, and betrayed herself by a heightened color. The

moment after she changed the subject. Mirabel could no longer resist the conclusion that Francine had told him the truth.

"When do you leave us?" she inquired.

"To-morrow is Saturday—I must go back as usual."

"And how will your deserted parish receive you?"

He made a desperate effort to be as amusing as usual.

"I am sure of preserving my popularity," he said, "while I have a cask in the cellar and a few spare sixpences in my pocket. The public spirit of my parishioners asks for nothing but money and beer. Before I went to that wearisome meeting I told my housekeeper that I was going to make a speech about reform. She didn't know what I meant. I explained that reform might increase the number of British citizens who had the right of voting at elections for Parliament. She brightened up directly. 'Ah!' she said, 'I've heard my husband talk about elections. The more there are of them, *he* says, the more money he'll get for his vote. I'm all for reform.' On my way out of the house I tried the man who works in my garden on the same subject. He didn't look at the matter from the housekeeper's sanguine point of view. 'I don't deny that Parliament once gave me a good dinner for nothing at the public-house,' he admitted. 'But that was years ago—and (you'll excuse me, sir) I hear nothing of another dinner to come. It's a matter of opinion, of course. I don't myself believe in reform.' There are specimens of the state of public opinion in our village!" He paused. Emily was listening, but he had not succeeded in choosing a subject that amused her. He tried a topic more nearly connected with his own interests—the topic of the future. "Our good friend has asked me to prolong my visit after Sunday's duties are over," he said. "I hope I shall find you here next week?"

"Will the affairs of your parish allow you to come back?" Emily asked, mischievously.

"The affairs of my parish—if you force me to confess it—were only an excuse."

"An excuse for what?"

"An excuse for keeping away from Monksmoor—in the interests of my own tranquillity. The experiment has failed. While you are here, I can't keep away."

She still declined to understand him seriously. "Must I tell you in plain words that flattery is thrown away on me?" she said.

"Flattery is not offered to you," he answered, gravely. "I beg your pardon for having led to the mistake by talking of myself." Having appealed to her indulgence by this act of submission, he ventured on another distant allusion to the man whom he hated and feared. "Shall I meet any friends of yours," he resumed, "when I return on Monday?"

"What do you mean?"

"I only mean to ask if Mr. Wyvil expects any new guests."

As he put the question, Cecilia's voice was heard behind them calling to Emily. They both turned round. Mr. Wyvil had joined his daughter and her two friends. He advanced to meet Emily.

"I have some news for you that you little expect," he said. "A telegram has just arrived from Netherwoods. Mr. Alban Morris has got leave of absence, and is coming here to-morrow."

CHAPTER XLIV.

COMPETING.

TIME at Monksmoor had advanced to the half-hour before dinner on Saturday evening.

Cecilia and Francine, Mr. Wyvil and Mirabel, were loitering in the conservatory. In the drawing-room Emily had been considerably left alone with Alban. He had missed the early train from Netherwoods; but he had arrived in time to dress for dinner and to offer the necessary explanations.

If it had been possible for Alban to allude to the anonymous letter he might have owned that his first impulse had led him to destroy it, and to assert his confidence in Emily by refusing Mr. Wyvil's invitation. But try as he might to forget them, the base words that he had read remained in his memory. Irritating him at the outset, they had ended in rousing his jealousy. Under that delusive influence he persuaded himself that he had acted, in the first instance, without due consideration. It was surely his interest—it might even be his duty—to go to Mr. Wyvil's house and judge for himself. After some last wretched moments of hesitation he had decided on effecting a compromise with his own better sense by consulting Miss Ladd. That excellent lady did exactly what he had expected her to do. She made arrangements which granted him leave of absence from the Saturday to the Tuesday following. The excuse which had served him in telegraphing to Mr. Wyvil must now be repeated in accounting for his unexpected appearance to Emily. "I found a person to take charge of my class," he said; "and I gladly availed myself of the opportunity of seeing you again."

After observing him attentively while he was speaking to her, Emily owned, with her customary frankness, that she had noticed something in his manner which left her not quite at her ease.

"I wonder," she said, "if there is any foundation for a doubt that has troubled me?" To his unutterable relief she at once explained what the doubt was. "I am afraid I offended you in replying to your letter about Miss Jethro."

In this case Alban could enjoy the luxury of speaking unreservedly. He confessed that Emily's letter had disappointed him.

"I expected you to answer me with less reserve," he replied; "and I began to think I had acted rashly in writing to you at all. When there is a better opportunity I may have a word to say—" He was apparently interrupted by something that he saw in the conservatory. Looking that way, Emily perceived that Mirabel was the object which had attracted Alban's attention. The vile anonymous letter was in his mind again. Without a preliminary word to prepare Emily, he suddenly changed the subject. "How do you like the clergyman?" he asked.

"Very much indeed," she replied, without the slightest embarrassment.

"Mr. Mirabel is clever and agreeable, and not at all spoiled by his success. I am sure," she said, innocently, "you will like him too."

Alban's face answered her unmistakably in the negative sense, but Emily's attention was drawn the other way by Francine. She joined them at the moment, on the lookout for any signs of an encouraging result which her treachery might already have produced. Alban had been inclined to suspect her, when he had received the letter. He rose and bowed as she approached. Something—he was unable to realize what it was—told him, in the moment when they looked at each other, that his suspicion had hit the mark. In the conservatory the ever-amiable Mirabel left his friends for a while in search of flowers for Cecilia. She turned to her father when they were alone, and asked which of the gentlemen was to take her in to dinner—Mr. Mirabel or Mr. Morris.

"Mr. Morris, of course," he answered. "He is the new guest, and he turns out to be more than the equal, socially speaking, of our other friend. When I showed him his room, I asked him if he was related to a man who bore the same name—a fellow-student of mine, years and years ago, at college. He is my friend's younger son; one of a ruined family, but persons of high distinction in their day."

Mirabel returned with the flowers just as dinner was announced.

"You are to take Emily to-day," Cecilia said to him, leading the way out of the conservatory. As they entered the drawing-room, Alban was just offering his arm to Emily. "Papa gives you to me, Mr. Morris," Cecilia explained, pleasantly. Alban hesitated, apparently not understanding the allusion. Mirabel interfered with his best grace: "Mr. Wyvil offers you the honor of taking his daughter to the dining-room." Alban's face darkened ominously as the elegant little clergyman gave his arm to Emily, and followed Mr. Wyvil and Francine out of the room. Cecilia looked at her silent and surly companion, and almost envied her lazy sister, dining—under cover of a convenient headache—in her own room.

Having already made up his mind that Alban Morris required careful handling, Mirabel waited a little before he led the conversation as usual. Between the soup and the fish, he made an interesting confession, addressed to Emily in the strictest confidence.

"I have taken a fancy to your friend Mr. Morris," he said. "First impressions, in my case, decide everything; I like people or dislike them on impulse. That man appeals to my sympathies. Is he a good talker?"

"I should say Yes," Emily answered, prettily, "if *you* were not present."

Mirabel was not to be beaten, even by a woman, in the art of paying compliments. He looked admiringly at Alban (sitting opposite to him), and said, "Let us listen."

This flattering suggestion not only pleased Emily, it artfully served Mirabel's purpose. That is to say, it secured him an opportunity for observation of what was going on at the other side of the table.

Alban's instincts as a gentleman had led him to control his irritation, and to regret that he had suffered it to appear. Anxious to please, he presented himself at his best. Gentle Cecilia forgave and forgot the angry look which had startled her. Mr. Wyvil was delighted with the son of his old friend. Emily felt secretly proud of the good opinions which her admirer was gathering; and Francine saw with pleasure that he was assert-

ing his claim to Emily's preference in the way of all others which would be most likely to discourage his rival. These various impressions—produced while Alban's enemy was ominously silent—began to suffer an imperceptible change from the moment when Mirabel decided that his time had come to take the lead. A remark made by Alban offered him the chance for which he had been on the watch. He agreed with the remark; he enlarged on the remark; he was brilliant and familiar, and instructive and amusing—and still it was all due to the remark. Alban's temper was once more severely tried. Mirabel's mischievous object had not escaped his penetration. He did his best to put obstacles in his adversary's way, and was baffled, time after time, with the readiest ingenuity. If he interrupted, the sweet-tempered clergyman submitted, and went on. If he differed, modest Mr. Mirabel said, in the most amiable manner, "I dare say I am wrong," and handled the topic from his opponent's point of view. Never had such a perfect Christian sat before at Mr. Wyvil's table: not a hard word, not an impatient look, escaped him. The longer Alban resisted, the more surely he lost ground in the general estimation. Cecilia was disappointed; Emily was grieved; Mr. Wyvil's favorable opinion began to waver; Francine was disgusted. When dinner was over, and the carriage was waiting to take the shepherd back to his flock by moonlight, Mirabel's triumph was complete. He had made Alban the innocent means of publicly exhibiting his perfect temper and perfect politeness under their best and brightest aspect.

So that day ended. Sunday promised to pass quietly, in the absence of Mirabel. The morning came, and it seemed doubtful whether the promise would be fulfilled.

Francine had passed an uneasy night. No such encouraging result as she had anticipated had hitherto followed the appearance of Alban Morris at Monksmoor. He had clumsily allowed Mirabel to improve his position—while he had himself lost ground—in Emily's estimation. If this first disastrous consequence of the meeting between the two men was permitted to repeat itself on future occasions, Emily and Mirabel would be brought more closely together, and Alban himself would be the unhappy cause of it. Francine rose on the Sunday morning before the table was laid for breakfast, resolved to try the effect of a timely word of advice.

Her bedroom was situated in the front of the house. The man she was looking for presently passed within her range of view from the window, on his way to take a morning walk in the park. She followed him immediately.

"Good-morning, Mr. Morris."

He raised his hat and bowed, without speaking and without looking at her.

"We resemble each other in one particular," she proceeded, graciously; "we both like to breathe the fresh air before breakfast."

He said exactly what common politeness obliged him to say, and no more—he said, "Yes."

Some girls might have been discouraged. Francine went on.

"It is no fault of mine, Mr. Morris, that we have not been better friends. For some reason, into which I don't presume to inquire, you seem to distrust me. I really don't know what I have done to deserve it."

"Are you sure of that?" he asked, eying her suddenly and searchingly as he spoke.

Her hard face settled into a rigid look; her eyes met his eyes with a stony, defiant stare. Now for the first time she knew that he suspected her of having written the anonymous letter. Every evil quality in her nature stood on the defense. A hardened old woman could not have sustained the shock of discovery with a more devilish composure than this girl displayed. "Perhaps you will explain yourself," she said.

"I have explained myself," he answered.

"Then I must be content," she rejoined, "to remain in the dark. I had intended, out of my regard for Emily, to suggest that you might, with advantage to yourself and to interests that are very dear to you, be more careful in your behavior to Mr. Mirabel. Are you disposed to listen to me?"

"Do you wish me to answer that question plainly, Miss De Sor?"

"I insist on your answering it plainly."

"Then I am *not* disposed to listen to you."

"May I know why, or am I to be left in the dark again?"

"You are to be left, if you please, to your own ingenuity."

Francine looked at him with a malignant smile. "One of these days, Mr. Morris, I will deserve your confidence in my ingenuity." She said it, and went back to the house.

This was the only element of disturbance that troubled the perfect tranquillity of the day. What Francine had proposed to do, with the one idea of making Alban serve her purpose, was accomplished a few hours later by Emily's influence for good over the man who loved her.

They passed the afternoon together uninterruptedly in the distant solitudes of the park. In the course of conversation Emily found an opportunity of discreetly alluding to Mirabel. "You mustn't be jealous of our clever little friend," she said; "I like him and admire him, but—"

"But you don't love him?"

She smiled at the eager way in which Alban put the question. "There is no fear of that," she answered, brightly.

"Not even if you knew that he loves you?"

"Not even then. Are you content at last? Promise me not to be rude to Mr. Mirabel again."

"For his sake?"

"No, for my sake. I don't like to see you place yourself at a disadvantage toward another man; I don't like you to disappoint me."

The happiness of hearing her say those words transfigured him; the manly beauty of his earlier and happier years seemed to have returned to Alban. He took her hand—he was too agitated to speak.

"You are forgetting Mr. Mirabel," she reminded him, gently.

"I will be all that is civil and kind to Mr. Mirabel; I will like him and admire him as you do. Oh, Emily, are you a little, only a very little, fond of me?"

"I don't quite know."

"May I try to find out?"

"How?" she asked.

Her fair cheek was very near to him. The softly rising color on it said, "Answer me here," and he answered.

CHAPTER XLV.

MISCHIEF-MAKING.

ON Monday Mirabel made his appearance, and the demon of discord returned with him.

Alban had employed the earlier part of the day in making a sketch in the park, intended as a little present for Emily. Presenting himself in the drawing-room when his work was completed, he found Cecilia and Francine alone. He asked where Emily was.

The question had been addressed to Cecilia. Francine answered it.

"Emily mustn't be disturbed," she said.

"Why not?"

"She is with Mr. Mirabel in the rose garden. I saw them talking together, evidently feeling the deepest interest in what they were saying to each other. Don't interrupt them; you will only be in the way."

Cecilia at once protested against this last assertion. "She is trying to make mischief, Mr. Morris—don't believe her. I am sure they will be glad to see you if you join them in the garden."

Francine rose, and left the room. She turned and looked at Alban as she opened the door. "Try it," she said, "and you will find I am right."

"Francine sometimes talks in a very ill-natured way," Cecilia gently remarked. "Do you think she means it, Mr. Morris?"

"I had better not offer an opinion," Alban replied.

"Why?"

"I can't speak impartially; I dislike Miss De Sor."

There was a pause. Alban's sense of self-respect forbade him to try the experiment which Francine had maliciously suggested. His thoughts—less easy to restrain—wandered in the direction of the garden. The attempt to make him jealous had failed; but he was conscious, at the same time, that Emily had disappointed him. After what they had said to each other in the park, she ought to have remembered that women are at the mercy of appearances. If Mirabel had something of importance to say to her, she might have avoided exposing herself to Francine's spiteful misconstruction. It would have been easy to arrange with Cecilia that a third person should be present at the interview.

While he was absorbed in these reflections, Cecilia—embarrassed by the silence—was trying to find a topic of conversation. Her sympathies were only waiting for a little encouragement from Alban. Was he displeased with Emily? The same question had occurred to Cecilia at the time of the correspondence on the subject of Miss Jethro. To recall those letters led her, by natural sequence, to another effort of memory. She was reminded of the person who had been the cause of the correspondence: her interest was revived in the mystery of Miss Jethro.

"Has Emily told you that I have seen your letters?" she asked.

He roused himself with a start. "I beg your pardon. What letters are you thinking of?"

"I was thinking particularly of the letter which mentioned Miss Jethro's visit. Emily was so puzzled and so surprised that she showed it to me—and we both consulted my father. Have you spoken to Emily about Miss Jethro?"

"I have tried—but when I mention Miss Jethro's name, Emily seems to be unwilling to pursue the subject."

"Have you made any discoveries since you wrote to Emily?"

"No; the mystery is as impenetrable as ever."

As he replied to her in those terms he saw Mirabel enter the conservatory from the garden, on his way to the drawing-room.

Happy in the conviction that Emily loved him, there was now no feeling of jealousy mingled with the dislike and distrust of the popular preacher, which Alban found it impossible to overcome. But to see the man, whose introduction to Emily it had been Miss Jethro's mysterious object to prevent, at the very moment when he had been speaking of Miss Jethro herself, was not only a temptation to curiosity, but a direct incentive (in Emily's own interests) to make an effort at discovery. Alban pursued the conversation with Cecilia in a tone which was loud enough to be heard in the conservatory.

"The one chance of getting any information that I can see," he proceeded, "is to speak to Mr. Mirabel."

"I shall be only too glad if I can be of any service to Miss Wyvil and Mr. Morris."

With those obliging words Mirabel made a dramatic entry, and looked at Cecilia with his irresistible smile. Startled by his sudden appearance, she unconsciously assisted Alban's design. Her silence gave him the opportunity of speaking in her place.

"We were talking," he said quietly to Mirabel, "of a lady with whom you are acquainted."

"Indeed! May I ask the lady's name?"

"Miss Jethro."

Mirabel sustained the shock with extraordinary self-possession, so far as any betrayal by sudden movement was concerned. But his color told the truth: it faded to ghastly paleness—it revealed even to Cecilia's eyes a man struck dumb by fright.

Alban offered him a chair. He refused to take it by a gesture. Alban tried an apology next. "I am afraid I have ignorantly revived some painful associations. Pray excuse me."

The apology roused Mirabel; he felt the necessity of offering some explanation. In timid animals the one defensive capacity which is always ready for action is cunning. Mirabel was too wily to dispute the inference—the inevitable inference—which any one must have drawn after seeing the effect on him that the name of Miss Jethro had produced. He admitted that "painful associations" had been revived, and deplored the "nervous sensibility" which had permitted it to be seen.

"No blame can possibly attach to *you*, my dear sir," he proceeded, in his most amiable manner. "Will it be indiscreet on my part if I ask how you first became acquainted with Miss Jethro?"

"I first became acquainted with her at Miss Ladd's school," Alban answered. "She was, for a short time only, one of the teachers; and she left

her situation rather suddenly." He paused—but Mirabel made no remark. "After an interval of a few months," he resumed, "I saw Miss Jethro again. She called on me at my lodgings, near Netherwoods."

"Merely to renew your former acquaintance?"

Mirabel made that inquiry with an eager anxiety for the reply which he was quite unable to conceal. It was plain that Miss Jethro had left him in ignorance of her memorable visit, and of the purpose that had led to it. Alban was under no engagement to keep the secret; and he was determined to leave no means untried of throwing light on Miss Jethro's mysterious warning. He repeated the plain narrative of the interview which he had communicated by letter to Emily. Mirabel's manner, while he listened, showed that Alban's answer had taken him agreeably by surprise. He had evidently serious reasons to dread what Miss Jethro might have it in her power to say of him. His face brightened the moment he knew that she had not said it.

"After what I have told you, can you give me no explanation?" Alban asked.

"I am quite unable, Mr. Morris, to help you."

Was he lying, or speaking the truth? The impression produced on Alban was that he had spoken the truth.

Women are never so ready as men to resign themselves to the disappointment of their hopes. Cecilia, silently listening up to this time, now ventured to speak, animated by her sisterly interest in Emily. "Have you no idea, Mr. Mirabel, of Miss Jethro's motive?" she asked.

"What motive do you mean, Miss Wyvil?"

"I mean her motive for trying to prevent Emily Brown from meeting you in my father's house."

"I know no more of her motive than you do," Mirabel replied.

Alban interposed. "Miss Jethro left me," he said, "with the intention—quite openly expressed—of trying to prevent you from accepting your invitation to Monksmoor. Did she make the attempt?"

Mirabel admitted that she had made the attempt. "But," he added, "without mentioning Miss Emily's name, and without even hinting that it was her wish to prevent me from meeting any person at Mr. Wyvil's house. I was asked to postpone my visit as a favor to herself, because she had her own reasons for wishing it. I had *my* reasons"—he bowed with gallantry to Cecilia—"for being eager to have the honor of knowing Mr. Wyvil and his daughter, and I refused."

Once more the doubt arose: was he lying, or speaking the truth? And once more Alban could not resist the conclusion that he was speaking the truth.

"There is one thing I should like to know," Mirabel said, uneasily; "has Miss Emily been informed of this strange affair?"

"Certainly!"

Mirabel seemed to be disposed to continue his inquiries, and suddenly changed his mind. "Is there anything more to be said?" he asked.

"Nothing that I know of," Alban answered.

"And nothing that I know of," Mirabel repeated, with the same emphasis. He bowed, and went out as he had come in—by way of the conservatory.

"Is he going back to Emily?" said Cecilia.

Alban rose to follow him, and checked himself. "No," he thought; "I trust Emily." He sat down again by Cecilia's side.

Mirabel had indeed returned to the rose garden. He found Emily employed as he had left her, in making a crown of roses, to be worn by Cecilia in the evening. But in one other respect there was a change. Francine was present.

"Excuse me for sending you on a needless errand," Emily said to Mirabel. "Miss De Sor tells me Mr. Morris has finished his sketch. She left him in the drawing-room. Why didn't you bring him here?"

"He was talking with Miss Wyvil."

Having made that reply, Mirabel looked at Francine. It was one of those significant looks which say to a third person, "Why are you here?" Francine's jealousy declined to understand him. She had gone into the rose garden for the express purpose of intruding on Emily and Mirabel, and she stood her ground. He tried a broader hint in words.

"Are you going to walk in the garden?" he said.

Francine was impenetrable. "No," she answered; "I am going to stay here with Emily."

Mirabel had no choice but to yield. Imperative anxieties forced him to say in Francine's presence what he had hoped to say to Emily privately.

"I bring you other news from the house than the news of Mr. Morris's return," he began. "The subject of conversation when I entered the drawing-room was—Miss Jethro."

Emily dropped the rose crown in her lap. Astonishment held her speechless.

"I am in some doubt," Mirabel continued, "whether Mr. Morris, in telling me of Miss Jethro's visit, has spoken without reserve. Don't suppose I blame him. I am in a state of anxiety that trusts to you for relief. Tell me, I beg and pray, exactly what *you* know! In speaking to Mr. Morris, did Miss Jethro say anything which tended to lower me in your estimation?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Mirabel—so far as I know. If I had heard anything of the kind, I should have thought it my duty to tell you. Will it relieve your anxiety if I go at once to Mr. Morris, and ask him plainly whether he has concealed anything from you or from me?"

Mirabel gratefully kissed her hand. "Your kindness overpowers me," he said, speaking for once with true emotion.

Emily immediately returned to the house. As soon as she was out of sight, Francine approached Mirabel, trembling with suppressed rage.

CHAPTER XLVI.

PRETENDING.

Miss De Sor began cautiously with an apology. "Excuse me, Mr. Mirabel, for reminding you of my presence."

Mr. Mirabel made no reply.

"I beg to say," Francine proceeded, "that I didn't intentionally see you kiss Emily's hand."

Mirabel stood, looking at the roses which Emily had left on her chair, as

completely absorbed in his own thoughts as if he had been alone in the garden.

"Am I not even worth notice?" Francine asked. "Ah, I know to whom I am indebted for your neglect!" She took him familiarly by the arm, and burst into a harsh laugh. "Tell me, now, in confidence, do you think Emily is fond of you?"

The impression left by Emily's kindness was still fresh in Mirabel's memory: he was in no humor to submit to the jealous resentment of a woman whom he regarded with perfect indifference. Through the varnish of politeness which overlaid his manner there rose to the surface the underlying insolence, hidden on all ordinary occasions from all human eyes. He answered Francine—mercilessly answered her—at last:

"It is the dearest hope of my life that she may be fond of me," he said.

Francine dropped his arm. "And fortune favors your hopes," she added, with an ironical assumption of interest in Mirabel's prospects. "When Mr. Morris leaves us to-morrow, he removes the only obstacle you have to fear. Am I right?"

"No; you are wrong."

"In what way, if you please?"

"In this way. I don't regard Mr. Morris as an obstacle. Emily is too delicate and too kind to hurt his feelings; she is not in love with him. There is no absorbing interest in her mind to divert her thoughts from me. She is idle and happy; she thoroughly enjoys her visit to this house, and I am associated with her enjoyment. There is my chance—"

He suddenly stopped. Listening to him thus far, unnaturally calm and cold, Francine now showed that she felt the lash of his contempt. A hideous smile passed slowly over her white face. It threatened the vengeance which knows no fear, no pity, no remorse—the vengeance of a jealous woman. Hysterical anger, furious language, Mirabel was prepared for. The smile frightened him.

"Well," she said, scornfully, "why don't you go on?"

A bolder man might still have maintained the audacious position which he had assumed. Mirabel's faint heart shrank from it. He was eager to shelter himself under the first excuse that he could find. His ingenuity, paralyzed by his fears, was unable to invent anything new. He feebly availed himself of the commonplace trick of evasion which he had read of in novels, and seen in action on the stage. "Is it possible," he asked, with an overacted assumption of surprise, "that you think I am in earnest?"

In the case of any other person, Francine would have instantly seen through that flimsy pretense. But the love which accepts the meanest crumbs of comfort that can be thrown to it—which fawns and grovels and deliberately deceives itself, in its own intensely selfish interests—was the love that burned in Francine's breast. The wretched girl believed Mirabel with such an ecstatic sense of relief that she trembled in every limb, and dropped into the nearest chair.

"I was in earnest," she said, faintly. "Didn't you see it?"

He was perfectly shameless; he denied that he had seen it, in the most positive manner. "Upon my honor, I thought you were mystifying me, and I humored the joke."

She sighed, and looked at him with an expression of tender reproach. "I wonder whether I can believe you?" she said, softly.

"Indeed you may believe me!" he assured her.

She hesitated—for the pleasure of hesitating. "I don't know. Emily is very much admired by some men. Why not by you?"

"For the best of reasons," he answered. "She is poor, and I am poor. Those are facts which speak for themselves."

"Yes; but Emily is bent on attracting you. She would marry you to-morrow if you asked her. Don't attempt to deny it! Besides, you kissed her hand."

"Oh, Miss De Sor!"

"Don't call me 'Miss De Sor'! Call me Francine. I want to know why you kissed her hand."

"Habit," he eagerly explained—"mere habit. You forget that I have lived abroad for many years."

His experience in foreign countries failed to interest her. "If I forgive you," she interposed, "will you kiss *my* hand?"

Mirabel obeyed, with a graceful alacrity which was a compliment in itself. "On the Continent," he resumed, "kissing a lady's hand—"

Francine interrupted him again. She remarked that he had not yet addressed her by her Christian name. "Why don't you call me 'Francine'?"

He humored her with inexhaustible servility. "I was about to say, Francine, that kissing a lady's hand is only a form of thanking her for her kindness. You must own that Emily—"

She interrupted him for the third time. "Emily?" she repeated. "Are you as familiar as that already? Does she call you 'Miles,' when you are by yourselves? Is there any effort at fascination which this charming creature has left untried? She has told you, no doubt, what a friendless and interesting person she is."

Even Mirabel felt that he must not permit this to pass.

"She has said nothing to me about herself," he answered. "What I know of her I know from Mr. Wyvil."

"Oh, indeed! Mr. Wyvil told you she was an orphan, of course?"

"He said she lost her mother when she was a child."

"How interesting! I suppose he mentioned her father next?"

"He only told me her father died suddenly, of heart-disease."

"Well, and what else? Never mind now! Here is somebody coming."

The person was only one of the servants. Mirabel felt profoundly grateful to the man for interrupting them.

"A message, I suppose," he said to Francine. "We are wanted at the house."

It turned out that only one of them was wanted—and that one was Mirabel. "Miss Brown wishes to speak to you, sir, if you are not engaged." There was a message!

Francine controlled herself until the man was out of hearing.

"Upon my word, this is too shameless!" she declared, indignantly. "Emily can't leave you with me for five minutes, without wanting to see you again. If you go to her, after what you have said to me," she cried, threatening Mirabel with her outstretched hand, "you are the meanest of men!"

He *was* the meanest of men—he carried out his cowardly submission to the last extremity.

"Only say what you wish me to do," he replied.

Even Francine expected some little resistance from a creature bearing the outward appearance of a man. "Oh, do you really mean it?" she asked.

He answered jauntily by a bow.

She could hardly feel sure of him yet. "Let me go to Emily instead of you," she suggested. "I will undertake to make your excuse."

"I will do anything to please you."

Francine gave him a farewell look. Her admiration made a desperate effort to express itself in appropriate words. "You are not a man," she said; "you are an angel!"

Left by himself, Mirabel sat down to rest. He reviewed his own conduct with perfect complacency. "Not one man in a hundred could have managed that she-devil as I have done," he thought. "How shall I explain matters to Emily?"

Considering this question, he looked by chance at the unfinished crown of roses. "The very thing to help me!" he said, and took out his pocket-book, and wrote these lines on a blank page:

"I have had a scene of jealousy with Miss De Sor, which is beyond all description. To spare *you* a similar infliction, I have done violence to my own feelings. Instead of instantly obeying the message which you have so kindly sent to me, I remain here for a little while—entirely for your sake. That poor mad creature must be humored, or she may create a scandal in the house. I know you will understand and forgive me."

Having torn out the page, and twisted it up among the roses, so that only a corner of the paper appeared in view, Mirabel called to a lad who was at work in the garden, and gave him his directions, accompanied by a shilling. "Take those flowers to the servants' hall, and tell one of the maids to put them in Miss Brown's room. Stop! Which is the way to the fruit garden?"

The lad gave the necessary directions. Mirabel walked away slowly with his hands in his pockets. His nerves had been shaken; he thought a little fruit might refresh him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DEBATING.

In the mean while Emily had been true to her promise to relieve Mirabel's anxieties on the subject of Miss Jethro. Entering the drawing-room in search of Alban, she found him talking with Cecilia, and heard her own name mentioned as she opened the door.

"Here she is at last!" Cecilia exclaimed. "What in the world has kept you all this time in the rose garden?"

"Has Mr. Mirabel been more interesting than usual?" Alban asked, gayly. Whatever sense of annoyance he might have felt in Emily's absence was forgotten the moment she appeared; all traces of trouble in his face vanished when they looked at each other.

"You shall judge for yourself," Emily replied, with a smile. "Mr. Mira-

bel has been speaking to me of a relative who is very dear to him—his sister."

Cecilia was surprised. "Why has he never spoken to *us* of his sister?" she asked.

"It's a sad subject to speak of, my dear. His sister lives a life of suffering—she has been for years a prisoner in her room. He writes to her constantly. His letters from Monksmoor have interested her, poor soul. It seems he said something about me, and she has sent a kind message, inviting me to visit her one of these days. Do you understand it now, Cecilia?"

"Of course I do! Tell me—is Mr. Mirabel's sister older or younger than he is?"

"Older."

"Is she married?"

"She is a widow."

"Does she live with her brother?" Alban asked.

"Oh no! She has her own house—far away in Northumberland."

"Is she near Sir Jervis Redwood?"

"I fancy not. Her house is on the coast."

"Any children?" Cecilia inquired.

"No; she is quite alone. Now, Cecilia, I have told you all I know—and I have something to say to Mr. Morris. No, you needn't leave us; it's a subject in which you are interested. A subject," she repeated, turning to Alban, "which you may have noticed is not very agreeable to me."

"Miss Jethro?" Alban guessed.

"Yes, Miss Jethro."

Cecilia's curiosity instantly asserted itself. "We have tried to get Mr. Mirabel to enlighten us, and tried in vain," she said. "You are a favorite. Have you succeeded?"

"I have made no attempt to succeed," Emily replied. "My only object is to relieve Mr. Mirabel's anxiety, if I can—with your help, Mr. Morris."

"In what way can I help you?"

"You mustn't be angry."

"Do I look angry?"

"You look serious. It is a very simple thing. Mr. Mirabel is afraid that Miss Jethro may have said something disagreeable about him which you might hesitate to repeat. He naturally wishes (if there is any such necessity) to set himself right, and he thought of speaking to you, but feared he might be misunderstood. There is no such danger where I am concerned; so I speak for him. Is he making himself uneasy without any reason?"

"Without the slightest reason. I have concealed nothing from Mr. Mirabel."

"Thank you for the explanation." She turned to Cecilia. "May I send one of the servants with a message? I may as well put an end to Mr. Mirabel's suspense."

The man was summoned, and was dispatched with the message. Emily would have done well, after this, if she had abstained from speaking further of Miss Jethro. But Mirabel's doubts had, unhappily, inspired a similar feeling of uncertainty in her own mind. She was now disposed to

attribute the tone of mystery in Alban's unlucky letter to some possible concealment, suggested by regard for herself. "I wonder whether I have any reason to feel uneasy?" she said, half in jest, half in earnest.

"Uneasy about what?" Alban asked.

"About Miss Jethro, of course! Has she said anything of *me* which your kindness has concealed?"

Alban seemed to be a little hurt by the doubt which her question implied. "Was that your motive," he said, "for answering my letter in a tone of reserve?"

"Indeed you are quite wrong!" Emily earnestly assured him. "I hardly knew how to answer you, I was so perplexed and startled—but there was no doubt of you in my mind. I consulted with Cecilia, and what I wrote I wrote under her father's advice. Shall we drop the subject?"

Alban would have willingly dropped the subject, but for that unfortunate allusion to Mr. Wyvil. Emily had unconsciously touched him on a sore place. He had already heard from Cecilia of the consultation over his letter, and had disapproved of it. In the daughter's presence it was impossible for him to say plainly that the father had consented to interfere in a matter which did not concern him. But he was sufficiently displeased to tell Emily what he felt in guarded language. "I think you were wrong to trouble Mr. Wyvil," he said.

The altered tone of his voice suggested to Emily that he would have spoken more severely if Cecilia had not been in the room. She thought him needlessly ready to complain of a harmless proceeding, and she too returned to the subject, after having proposed to drop it not a minute since!

"You didn't tell me I was to keep your letter a secret," she replied.

Cecilia made matters worse—with the best intentions. "I'm sure, Mr. Morris, my father was only too glad to give Emily his advice," she said. "You know what a clever man he is? Well, he was as much puzzled as we were, and I am sure he regretted it for Emily's sake."

Alban remained silent—ungraciously silent, as Emily thought, after Mr. Wyvil's kindness to him.

"The thing to regret," she remarked, "is that Mr. Morris allowed Miss Jethro to leave him without explaining herself. In his place, I should have insisted on knowing why she wanted to prevent me from meeting Mr. Mirabel in this house."

Alban still listened in silence. Now, when it was too late, he was sorry that he had mentioned Mr. Wyvil's name.

Cecilia made another unlucky attempt at judicious interference. This time she tried a gentle remonstrance.

"Remember, Emily, how Mr. Morris was situated. He could hardly be rude to a lady. And I dare say she had good reasons for not wishing to explain herself."

"That is exactly my complaint against her," Emily rejoined. "If Miss Jethro had good reasons, I want to know what they were."

Francine opened the drawing-room door, and heard Emily's last words.

"Miss Jethro again!" she exclaimed.

"Where is Mr. Mirabel?" Emily asked. "I sent him a message."

"He regrets to say he is otherwise engaged for the present," Francine

replied, with spiteful politeness. "Don't let me interrupt the conversation. Who is this Miss Jethro, whose name is on everybody's lips?"

Alban spoke at last. "We have done with the subject," he said, sharply.

"Because I am here?"

"Because we have said more than enough about Miss Jethro already."

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Morris," Emily answered, resenting the masterful tone which Alban's interference had assumed. "I have not done with Miss Jethro yet, I can assure you."

"My dear, you don't know where she lives," Cecilia reminded her.

"Leave me to discover it," Emily answered, hotly. "Perhaps Mr. Mirabel knows. I shall ask Mr. Mirabel."

"I thought you would find a reason for returning to Mr. Mirabel," Francine remarked.

Before Emily could reply, one of the maids entered the room with a wreath of roses in her hand.

"Mr. Mirabel sends you these flowers, miss. The boy said they were to be taken to your room. I thought it was a mistake, and I have brought them to you here."

Francine, who happened to be nearest to the door, took the roses from the girl on pretense of handing them to Emily. Her jealous vigilance detected the one visible morsel of Mirabel's letter, twisted up with the flowers. Had Emily entrapped him into a secret correspondence with her? "A scrap of waste paper among your roses," she said, crumpling it up in her hand, as if she meant to throw it away.

But Emily was too quick for her. She caught Francine by the wrist. "Waste paper or not," she said, "it was among my flowers, and it belongs to me."

Francine gave up the letter, with a look which might have startled Emily if she had noticed it. She handed the roses to Cecilia. "I was making a wreath for you to wear this evening, my dear, and I left it in the garden. It is not quite finished yet."

Cecilia was delighted. "How lovely it is!" she exclaimed. "And how very kind of you! I'll finish it myself." She turned away to the conservatory.

"I had no idea I was interfering with a letter," said Francine, watching Emily with fiercely attentive eyes while she smoothed out the crumpled paper.

Having read what Mirabel had written to her, Emily considered a little, then rang the bell and recalled the maid. "Is the messenger waiting?" she asked. Hearing that the lad was still in the house, she wrote a few lines, addressed to Mirabel. Giving them to the maid at the door, she looked round toward Alban.

He had noticed something in Francine's face which he was at a loss to understand, but which made her presence in the room absolutely hateful to him. Emily stopped him just as he was about to follow Cecilia into the conservatory.

"I have set Mr. Mirabel's uneasy mind at rest," she said—"thanks to you. And I have done something else which I am afraid will not meet with your approval. I have asked him if he knows Miss Jethro's address."

"I hope he is as ignorant of it as I am," Alban answered, gravely.

"Are we going to quarrel over Miss Jethro as we once quarrelled over Mrs. Rook?" Emily asked, with the readiest recovery of her good-humor. "Come, come! I am sure you are as anxious in your own private mind to have this matter cleared up as I am."

"With one difference—that I think of consequences, and you don't." He said it in his gentlest and kindest manner, and stepped into the conservatory.

"Never mind the consequences," she called after him, "if we can only get at the truth. I hate being deceived."

"There is no person living who has better reason than you have to say that."

Emily looked round with a start. Alban was out of hearing. It was Francine who had answered her.

"What do you mean?" she said.

Francine hesitated. A ghastly paleness overspread her face.

"Are you ill?" Emily asked.

"No; I am thinking."

After waiting awhile in silence, Emily moved away toward the door of the drawing-room. Francine suddenly held up her hand.

"Stop!" she cried.

Emily stood still.

"My mind is made up," Francine said.

"Made up—to what?"

"You asked what I meant, just now."

"I did."

"Well, my mind is made up to answer you. Miss Emily Brown, you are leading a sadly frivolous life in this house. I am going to give you something more serious to think about than your flirtation with Mr. Mirabel. Oh, don't be impatient! I am coming to the point. Without knowing it yourself, you have been the victim of deception for years past—cruel deception—wicked deception that puts on the mask of mercy."

"Are you alluding to Miss Jethro?" Emily asked, in astonishment. "I thought you were strangers to each other. Just now, you wanted to know who she was."

"I know nothing about her. I care nothing about her. I am not thinking of Miss Jethro."

"Who are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking," Francine answered, "of your dead father."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

INVESTIGATING.

HAVING revived his sinking energies in the fruit garden, Mirabel seated himself under the shade of a tree, and reflected on the critical position in which he was placed by Francine's jealousy.

If Miss De Sor continued to be Mr. Wyvil's guest, there seemed to be no other choice before Mirabel than to leave Monksmoor, and to trust to a favorable reply to his sister's invitation for the free enjoyment of Emily's society under another roof. Try as he might, he could arrive at no more

satisfactory conclusion than this. In his preoccupied state time passed quickly. Nearly an hour had elapsed before he rose to return to the house.

Entering the hall, he was startled by a cry of terror in a woman's voice coming from the upper regions. At the same time Mr. Wyvil, passing along the bedroom corridor after leaving the music-room, was confronted by his daughter leaving Emily's bed-chamber in such a state of alarm that she could hardly speak.

"Gone!" she cried, the moment she saw her father.

Mr. Wyvil took her in his arms and tried to compose her. "Who has gone?" he asked.

"Emily. Oh, papa, Emily has left us! She has heard dreadful news: she told me so herself."

"What news? How did she hear it?"

"I don't know how she heard it. I went back to the drawing-room to show her my roses—"

"Was she alone?"

"Yes. She frightened me—she seemed quite wild. She said, 'Let me be by myself; I shall have to go home.' She kissed me, and ran up to her room. Oh, I am such a fool! Any one else would have taken care not to lose sight of her."

"How long did you leave her by herself?"

"I can't say. I thought I would go and tell you. And then I got anxious about her, and knocked at her door, and looked into the room. Gone! gone!"

Mr. Wyvil rang the bell, and confided Cecilia to the care of her maid. Mirabel had already joined him in the corridor. They went down-stairs together, and consulted with Alban. He volunteered to make immediate inquiries at the railway station. Mr. Wyvil followed him as far as the lodge gate, which opened on the high-road, while Mirabel went to a second gate, at the opposite extremity of the park.

Mr. Wyvil obtained the first news of Emily. The lodge-keeper had seen her pass him, on her way out of the park, in the greatest haste. He had called after her, "Anything wrong, miss?" and had received no reply. Asked what time had elapsed since this had happened, he was too confused to be able to answer with any certainty. He knew that she had taken the road which led to the station, and he knew no more.

Mr. Wyvil and Mirabel met again at the house, and instituted an examination of the servants. No further discoveries were made tending to throw light on the mystery of the departure.

The question which occurred to everybody was suggested by the words which Cecilia had repeated to her father. Emily had said she had "heard dreadful news." How had that news reached her? The one postal delivery at Monksmoor was in the morning. Had any special messenger arrived with a letter for Emily? The servants were absolutely certain that no such person had entered the house. The one remaining conclusion suggested that somebody must have communicated the evil tidings by word of mouth. But here again no evidence was to be obtained. No visitor had called during the day, and no new guests had arrived. Investigation was completely baffled.

Alban returned from the railway with news of the fugitive.

He had reached the station ten minutes after the departure of the London train. The clerk at the office recognized his description of Emily, and stated that she had taken her ticket for London. The station-master had opened the carriage door for her, and had noticed that the young lady appeared to be very much agitated. This information obtained, Alban had dispatched a telegram to Emily—in Cecilia's name: "Pray send us a few words to relieve our anxiety, and let us know if we can be of any service to you."

This was plainly all that could be done—but Cecilia was not satisfied. If her father had permitted it, she would have followed Emily. Alban comforted her. He apologized to Mr. Wyvil for shortening his visit, and announced his intention of travelling to London by the next train. "We may renew our inquiries to some advantage," he added, after hearing what had happened in his absence, "if we can find out who was the last person who saw her, and spoke to her, before your daughter found her alone in the drawing-room. When I went out of the room I left her with Miss De Sor."

The maid who waited on Miss De Sor was sent for. Francine had been out, by herself, walking in the park. She was then in her room changing her dress. On hearing of Emily's sudden departure, she had been (as the maid reported) "much shocked, and quite at a loss to understand what it meant."

Joining her friends a few minutes later, Francine presented, so far as personal appearance went, a strong contrast to the pale and anxious faces round her. She looked wonderfully well after her walk. In other respects she was in perfect harmony with the prevalent feeling. She expressed herself with the utmost propriety; her sympathy moved poor Cecilia to tears.

"I am sure, Miss De Sor, you will try to help us?" Mr. Wyvil began.

"With the greatest pleasure," Francine answered.

"How long were you and Miss Emily Brown together after Mr. Morris left you?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour, I should think."

"Did anything remarkable occur in the course of conversation?"

"Nothing whatever."

Alban interfered for the first time.

"Did you say anything," he asked, "which agitated or offended Miss Brown?"

"That's rather an extraordinary question," Francine remarked.

"Have you no other answer to give?" Alban inquired.

"I answer—No!" she said, with a sudden outburst of anger.

There the matter dropped. While she spoke in reply to Mr. Wyvil, Francine had confronted him without embarrassment. When Alban interposed, she never looked at him, except when he provoked her to anger. Did she remember that the man who was questioning her was also the man who had suspected her of writing the anonymous letter? Alban was on his guard against himself, knowing how he disliked her. But the conviction in his own mind was not to be resisted. In some unimaginable way Francine was associated with Emily's flight from the house.

The answer to the telegram sent from the railway station had not arrived when Alban took his departure for London. Cecilia's suspense began to grow unendurable; she looked to Mirabel for comfort, and found none. His office was to console, and his capacity for performing that office was notorious among his admirers; but he failed to present himself to advantage when Mr. Wyvil's lovely daughter had need of his services. He was, in truth, too sincerely anxious and distressed to be capable of commanding his customary resources of ready-made sentiment and fluently pious philosophy. Emily's influence had awakened the only earnest and true feeling which had ever ennobled the popular preacher's life.

Toward evening the long-expected telegram was received at last. What could be said under the circumstances, it said in these words:

"Safe at home. Don't be uneasy about me. Will write soon."

With that promise they were for the time forced to be content.

BOOK THE FIFTH.—THE COTTAGE.

CHAPTER XLIX.

SHE KNOWS IT NOW.

MRS. ELLMOTHER, left in charge of Emily's place of abode, and feeling sensible of her lonely position from time to time, had just thought of trying the cheering influence of a cup of tea, when she heard a cab draw up at the cottage gate. A violent ring at the bell followed. She opened the door, and found Emily on the steps. One look at that dear and familiar face was enough for the old servant.

"God help us!" she cried; "what's wrong now?"

Without a word of reply, Emily led the way into the bed-chamber which had been the scene of Miss Letitia's death. Mrs. Ellmother hesitated on the threshold.

"Why do you bring me in here?" she asked.

"Why did you try to keep me out?" Emily answered.

"When did I try to keep you out, miss?"

"When I came home from school to nurse my aunt. Ah, you remember now! Is it true—I ask you here, where your old mistress died—is it true that my aunt deceived me about my father's death, and that you knew it?"

There was dead silence. Mrs. Ellmother trembled horribly, her lips dropped apart, her eyes wandered round the room with a stare of idiotic terror. "Is it her ghost tells you that?" she whispered. "Where is her ghost? The room whirls round and round, miss, and the air sings in my ears."

Emily sprang forward to support her. She staggered to a chair, and lifted her great bony hands in wild entreaty.

"Don't frighten me," she said. "Stand back!"

Emily obeyed her. She dashed the cold sweat off her forehead.

"You were talking about your father's death just now," she burst out, in desperate, defiant tones. "Your father died of heart-complaint."

"My father died murdered in the inn at Zeeland! All the long way to London I have tried to doubt it. Oh, me, I know it now!"

Answering in those words, she looked toward the bed. Harrowing remembrances of her aunt's delirious self-betrayal made the room unendurable to her. She ran out. The parlor door was open. Entering the room, she paused by a portrait of her father, which her aunt had hung on the wall over the fire-place. She threw herself on the sofa, and burst into a passionate fit of crying. "Oh, my father! my dear, gentle, loving father! my first, best, truest friend—murdered! murdered! O God! where was your justice, where was your mercy, when he died that dreadful death?"

A hand was laid on her shoulder; a voice said to her, "Hush, my child! God knows best."

Emily looked up, and saw that Mrs. Ellmother had followed her. "You poor old soul," she said, suddenly remembering; "I frightened you in the other room."

"I have got over it, my dear. I am old, and I have lived a hard life. A hard life schools a person. I make no complaints; I learned my lesson before you were born." She stopped, and began to shudder again. "Will you believe me if I tell you something?" she asked. "I warned my self-willed mistress. Standing by your father's coffin, I warned her. Hide the truth as you may (I said), a time will come when our child will know what you are keeping from her now. One or both of us may live to see it. I am the one who has lived; no refuge in the grave for me. I want to hear about it—there's no fear of frightening or hurting me now—I want to hear how you found it out. Was it by accident, my dear, or did a person tell you?"

Emily's mind was far away from Mrs. Ellmother. She rose from the sofa, with her hands held fast over her aching heart.

"The one duty of my life," she said—"I am thinking of the one duty of my life. Look! I am calm now; I am resigned to my hard lot. Never, never again, can the dear memory of my father be what it was! From this time it is the horrid memory of a crime. The crime has gone unpunished; the man has escaped others. He shall not escape Me." She paused, and looked at Mrs. Ellmother absently. "What did you say just now? You want to hear how I know what I know? Naturally! naturally! Sit down here—sit down, my old friend, on the sofa with me—and take your mind back to Netherwoods. Alban Morris—"

Mrs. Ellmother recoiled from Emily in dismay. "Don't tell me *he* had anything to do with it! The kindest of men; the best of men!"

"The man of all men living who least deserves your good opinion or mine," Emily answered, sternly.

"You!" Mrs. Ellmother exclaimed—"you say that!"

"I say it. He—who won on me to like him—he was in the conspiracy to deceive me, and you know it. He heard me talk of the newspaper story of the murder of my father—I say, he heard me talk of it composedly, talk of it carelessly, in the innocent belief that it was the murder of a stranger—and he never opened his lips to prevent that horrid profanation. He never even said, *Speak of something else*; I won't hear you. No more

of him! God forbid I should ever see him again! No! Do what I told you. Carry your mind back to Netherwoods. One night you let Francine De Sor frighten you. You ran away from her into the garden. Keep quiet! At your age, must I set you an example of self-control?"

"I want to know, Miss Emily, where Francine De Sor is now?"

"She is at the house in the country which I have left."

"Where does she go next, if you please? Back to Miss Ladd?"

"I suppose so. What interest have you in knowing where she goes next?"

"I won't interrupt you, miss. It's true that I ran away into the garden. I can guess who followed me. How did she find her way to me and Mr. Morris in the dark?"

"The smell of tobacco guided her—she knew who smoked—she had seen him talking to you on that very day—she followed the scent—she heard what you two said to each other—and she has repeated it to me. Oh, my old friend, the malice of a revengeful girl has enlightened me, when you, my nurse—and he, my lover—left me in the dark: it has told me how my father died!"

"That's said bitterly, miss!"

"Is it said truly?"

"No. It isn't said truly of myself. God knows you would never have been kept in the dark if your aunt had listened to me. I begged and prayed—I went down on my knees to her—I warned her, as I told you just now. Must I tell you what a headstrong woman Miss Letitia was? She insisted. She put the choice before me of leaving her at once and forever, or giving in. I wouldn't have given in to any other creature on the face of this earth. I am obstinate, as you have often told me. Well, your aunt's obstinacy beat mine; I was too fond of her to say No. Besides, if you ask me who was to blame in the first place, I tell you it wasn't your aunt; she was frightened into it."

"Who frightened her?"

"Your godfather—the great London surgeon—he who was visiting in our house at the time."

"Sir Richard?"

"Yes—Sir Richard. He said he wouldn't answer for the consequences, in the delicate state of your health, if we told you the truth. Ah, he had it all his own way after that. He went with Miss Letitia to the inquest; he won over the coroner and the newspaper men to his will; he kept your aunt's name out of the papers; he took charge of the coffin; he hired the undertaker and his men, strangers from London; he wrote the certificate—who but he! Everybody was cap in hand to the famous man!"

"Surely the servants and the neighbors asked questions?"

"Hundreds of questions! What did that matter to Sir Richard? They were like so many children in *his* hands. And, mind you, the luck helped him. To begin with, there was the common name. Who was to pick out your poor father among the thousands of James Browns? Then, again, the house and lands went to the male heir, as they called him—the man your father quarrelled with in the by-gone time. He brought his own establishment with him. Long before you got back from the friends you were staying with—don't you remember it?—we had cleared out of the

house; we were miles and miles away; and the old servants were scattered abroad, finding new situations wherever they could. How could you suspect us? We had nothing to fear in that way; but my conscience pricked me. I made another attempt to prevail on Miss Letitia when you had recovered your health. I said: 'There's no fear of a relapse now; break it to her gently, but tell her the truth.' No; your aunt was too fond of you. She daunted me with dreadful fits of crying when I tried to persuade her. And that wasn't the worst of it. She bade me remember what an excitable man your father was; she reminded me that the misery of your mother's death laid him low with brain-fever. She said: 'Emily takes after her father: I have heard you say it yourself. She has his constitution and his sensitive nerves. Don't you know how she loved him; how she talks of him to this day? Who can tell, if we are not careful, what dreadful mischief we may do?' That was how my mistress worked on me. I got infected with her fears: it was as if I had caught an infection of disease. Oh, my dear, blame me if it must be, but don't forget how I have suffered for it since. I was driven away from my dying mistress, in terror of what she might say while you were watching at her bedside. I have lived in fear of what you might ask me, and have longed to go back to you, and have not had the courage to do it. Look at me now!"

The poor creature tried to take out her handkerchief; her quivering hand helplessly entangled itself in her dress. "I can not even dry my eyes," she said, faintly. "Try to forgive me, miss."

Emily put her arms round the old nurse's neck and kissed her.

For a while they were silent. Through the window that was open to the little garden came the one sound that could be heard—the gentle trembling of leaves in the evening wind.

The silence was harshly broken by the bell at the cottage door. They both started.

Emily's heart beat fast. "Who can it be?" she said.

Mrs. Ellmother rose. "Shall I say you can't see anybody?" she asked, before leaving the room.

"Yes, yes!"

Emily heard the door open; heard low voices in the passage. There was a momentary interval. Then Mrs. Ellmother returned. She said nothing. Emily spoke to her.

"Is it a visitor?"

"Yes."

"Have you said I can't see anybody?"

"I couldn't say it."

"Why not?"

"Don't be hard on him, my dear. It's Mr. Alban Morris."

CHAPTER L

MISS LADD ADVISES.

MRS. ELLMOTHER sat by the dying embers of the kitchen fire, thinking over the events of the day in perplexity and distress.

She had waited at the cottage door for a friendly word with Alban after

he had left Emily. The stern despair in his face warned her to let him go in silence. She had looked into the parlor next. Pale and cold, Emily lay on the sofa, sunk in helpless depression of body and mind. "Don't speak to me," she whispered; "I am quite worn out." It was but too plain that the view of Alban's conduct which she had already expressed was the view to which she had adhered at the interview between them. They had parted in grief—perhaps in anger—perhaps forever. Mrs. Ellmother lifted Emily in compassionate silence, and carried her upstairs, and waited by her until she slept.

In the still hours of the night the thoughts of the faithful old servant, dwelling for a while on past and present, advanced by slow degrees to consideration of the doubtful future. Measuring to the best of her ability the responsibility which had fallen upon her, she felt that it was more than she could bear, or ought to bear, alone. To whom could she look for help?

Emily's friends at the country house were strangers to her. Dr. Allday was near at hand, but Emily had forbidden her to send for him. "He will torment me with questions," she said, "and I want to keep my mind quiet, if I can." But one person was left to whose ever-ready kindness Mrs. Ellmother could appeal, and that person was Miss Ladd.

It would have been easy to ask the help of the good school-mistress in comforting and advising the favorite pupil whom she loved. But Mrs. Ellmother had another object in view: she was determined that the cold-blooded cruelty of Emily's treacherous friend should not be allowed to triumph with impunity. If an ignorant old woman could do nothing else, she could tell the plain truth, and could leave Miss Ladd to decide whether such a person as Francine deserved to remain under her care.

To feel justified in taking this step was one thing, to put it all clearly in writing was another. After vainly making the attempt overnight, Mrs. Ellmother tore up her letter, and communicated with Miss Ladd by means of a telegraphic message in the morning: "Miss Emily is in great distress. I must not leave her. I have something besides to say to you which can not be put into a letter. Will you please come to us?"

Later in the forenoon Mrs. Ellmother was called to the door by the arrival of a visitor. The personal appearance of the stranger impressed her favorably. He was a handsome little gentleman; his manners were winning, and his voice was singularly pleasant to hear.

"I have come from Mr. Wyvil's house in the country," he said; "and I bring a letter from his daughter. May I take the opportunity of asking if Miss Emily is well?"

"Far from it, sir, I am sorry to say. She is so poorly that she keeps her bed."

At this reply the visitor's face revealed such sincere sympathy and regret that Mrs. Ellmother was interested in him. She added a word more. "My mistress has had a hard trial to bear, sir. I hope there is no bad news for her in the young lady's letter?"

"On the contrary, there is news that she will be glad to hear: Miss Wyvil is coming here this evening. Will you excuse my asking if Miss Emily has had medical advice?"

"She won't hear of seeing the doctor, sir. He's a good friend of hers,

and he lives close by. I am unfortunately alone in the house. If I could leave her, I would go at once and ask his advice."

"Let *me* go!" Mirabel eagerly proposed.

Mrs. Ellmother's face brightened. "That's kindly thought of, sir, if you don't mind the trouble."

"My good lady, nothing is a trouble in your young mistress's service. Give me the doctor's name and address, and tell me what to say to him."

"There is one thing you must be careful of," Mrs. Ellmother answered. "He mustn't come here as if he had been sent for; she would refuse to see him."

Mirabel understood her. "I will not forget to caution him. Kindly tell Miss Emily I called—my name is Mirabel. I will return to-morrow."

He hastened away on his errand, only to find that he had arrived too late. Dr. Allday had left London; called away to a serious case of illness. He was not expected to get back until late in the afternoon. Mirabel left a message, saying that he would return in the evening.

The next visitor who arrived at the cottage was the trusty friend in whose generous nature Mrs. Ellmother had wisely placed confidence. No self-interested consideration had interfered with Miss Ladd's resolution to answer the telegram in person the moment she read it.

"If there is bad news," she said, "don't try to prepare me. Tell it at once, in the fewest words."

"There is nothing that need alarm you, ma'am, but there is a great deal to say before you see Miss Emily. My stupid head turns giddy with thinking of it. I hardly know where to begin."

"Begin with Emily," Miss Ladd suggested.

Mrs. Ellmother took the advice. She described Emily's unexpected arrival on the previous day, and she repeated what had passed between them afterward. Miss Ladd's first impulse, when she had recovered her composure, was to go to Emily without waiting to hear more. Not presuming to stop her, Mrs. Ellmother ventured to put a question. "Do you happen to have my telegram about you, ma'am?" Miss Ladd produced it. "Will you please look at the last part of it again?"

Miss Ladd read the words: "I have something besides to say to you which can not be put into a letter." She at once returned to her chair.

"Does what you have still to tell me refer to any person whom I know?" she said.

"It refers, ma'am, to Miss De Sor. I am afraid I shall distress you."

"What did I say when I came in?" Miss Ladd asked. "Speak out plainly; and try to begin at the beginning."

Mrs. Ellmother looked back through her memory of past events, and began by alluding to the feeling of curiosity which she had excited in Francine on the day when Emily had made them known to one another. From this she advanced to the narrative of what had taken place at Netherwoods—to the atrocious attempt to frighten her by means of the image of wax—to the discovery made by Francine in the garden at night—and to the circumstances under which that discovery had been communicated to Emily.

Miss Ladd's face reddened with indignation. "Are you sure of all that you have said?" she asked.

"I am quite sure, ma'am. I hope I have not done wrong," Mrs. Ellmother added, simply, "in telling you all this?"

"Wrong?" Miss Ladd repeated, warmly. "If that wretched girl has no defense to offer, she is a disgrace to my school, and I owe you a debt of gratitude for showing her to me in her true character. She shall return at once to Netherwoods; and she shall answer me to my entire satisfaction, or leave my house. What cruelty! what duplicity! In all my experience of girls, I have never met with the like of it. Let me go to my dear little Emily, and try to forget what I have heard."

Mrs. Ellmother led the good lady to Emily's room, and returning to the lower part of the house, went out into the garden. The mental effort that she had made had left its result in an aching head and in an overpowering sense of depression. "A mouthful of fresh air will revive me," she thought.

The front garden and the back garden at the cottage communicated with each other. Walking slowly round and round, Mrs. Ellmother heard footsteps on the road outside, which stopped at the gate. She looked through the grating, and discovered Alban Morris.

"Come in, sir," she said, rejoiced to see him. He obeyed in silence. The full view of his face shocked Mrs. Ellmother. Never in her experience of the friend who had been so kind to her at Netherwoods had he looked so old and so haggard as he looked now. "Oh, Mr. Alban, I see how she has distressed you! Don't take her at her word. Keep a good heart, sir—young girls are never long together of the same mind."

Alban gave her his hand. "I mustn't speak about it," he said. "Silence helps me to bear my misfortune as becomes a man. I have had some hard blows in my time: they don't seem to have blunted my sense of feeling as I thought they had. Thank God, she doesn't know how she has made me suffer! I want to ask her pardon for having forgotten myself yesterday. I spoke roughly to her at one time. No, I won't intrude on her; I have said I am sorry in writing. Do you mind giving it to her? Good-by—and thank you. I mustn't stay longer; Miss Ladd expects me at Netherwoods."

"Miss Ladd is in the house, sir, at this moment."

"Here, in London!"

"Upstairs, with Miss Emily."

"Upstairs! Is Emily ill?"

"She is getting better, sir. Would you like to see Miss Ladd?"

"I should, indeed! I have something to say to her, and time is of importance to me. May I wait in the garden?"

"Why not in the parlor, sir?"

"The parlor reminds me of happier days. In time I may have courage enough to look at the room again. Not now."

"If she doesn't make it up with that good man," Mrs. Ellmother thought, on her way back to the house, "my nurse-child is what I have never believed her to be yet—she's a fool."

In half an hour more Miss Ladd joined Alban on the little plot of grass behind the cottage. "I bring Emily's reply to your letter," she said. "Read it before you speak to me."

Alban read it: "Don't suppose you have offended me, and be assured

that I am grateful for the kind manner in which your note is written. I wish I could write as acceptably in return. It is not to be done. I am as unable as ever to enter into your motives. You are not my relation; you were under no obligation of secrecy; you heard me speak ignorantly of the murder of my father, as if it had been the murder of a stranger; and yet you kept me—deliberately, cruelly kept me—deceived! The remembrance of it burns me like fire. I can not—oh, Alban, I can not restore you to the place in my estimation which you have lost! If you wish to help me to bear my trouble, I entreat you not to write to me again."

Alban offered the letter silently to Miss Ladd. She signed to him to keep it.

"I know what Emily has written," she said; "and I have told her what I now tell you—she is wrong; in every way wrong. It is the misfortune of her impetuous nature that she rushes to conclusions, and those conclusions once formed, she holds to them with all the strength of her character. In this matter she has looked at her side of the question exclusively; she is blind to your side."

"Not willfully!" Alban interposed.

Miss Ladd looked at him with admiration. "You defend Emily?" she said.

"I love her," Alban answered.

Miss Ladd felt for him, as Mrs. Ellmother had felt for him. "Trust to time, Mr. Morris," she resumed. "The danger to be afraid of is—the danger of some headlong action on her part in the interval. Who can say what the end may be if she persists in her present way of thinking? There is something monstrous in a young girl declaring that it is *her* duty to pursue a murderer, and to bring him to justice! Don't you see it yourself?"

Alban still defended Emily. "It seems to me to be a natural impulse," he said—"natural and noble."

"Noble!" Miss Ladd exclaimed.

"Yes; for it grows out of the love which has not died with her father's death."

"Then you encourage her?"

"With my whole heart, if she would give me the opportunity!"

"We won't pursue the subject, Mr. Morris. I am told by Mrs. Ellmother that you have something to say to me. What is it?"

"I have to ask you," Alban replied, "to let me resign my situation at Netherwoods."

Miss Ladd was not only surprised, she was also—a very rare thing with her—inclined to be suspicious. After what he had said of Emily, it occurred to her that Alban might be meditating some desperate project, with the hope of recovering his lost place in her favor.

"Have you heard of some better employment?" she asked.

"I have heard of no employment. My mind is not in a state to give the necessary attention to my pupils."

"Is that your only reason for wishing to leave me?"

"It is one of my reasons."

"The only one which you think it necessary to mention?"

"Yes."

"I shall be sorry to lose you, Mr. Morris."

"Believe me, Miss Ladd, I am not ungrateful for your kindness."

"Will you let me, in all kindness, say something more?" Miss Ladd answered. "I don't intrude on your secrets; I only hope that you have no rash project in view."

"I don't understand you, Miss Ladd."

"Yes, Mr. Morris, you do."

She shook hands with him, and went back to Emily.

CHAPTER LI.

THE DOCTOR SEES.

ALBAN returned to Netherwoods, to continue his services until another master could be found to take his place.

By a later train Miss Ladd followed him. Emily was too well aware of the importance of the mistress's presence to the well-being of the school to permit her to remain at the cottage. It was understood that they were to correspond, and that Emily's room was waiting for her at Netherwoods whenever she felt inclined to occupy it.

Mrs. Ellmother made the tea that evening earlier than usual. Being alone again with Emily, it struck her that she might take advantage of her position to say a word in Alban's favor. She had chosen her time unfortunately. The moment she pronounced the name, Emily checked her by a look, and spoke of another person—that person being Miss Jethro.

Mrs. Ellmother entered her protest in her downright way. "Whatever you do, don't go back to that. What does Miss Jethro matter to you?"

"I am more interested in her than you suppose; I happen to know why she left the school."

"Begging your pardon, miss, that's quite impossible."

"She left the school," Emily persisted, "for a serious reason. Miss Ladd discovered that she had used false references."

"Good Lord! who told you that?"

"You see I know it. I asked Miss Ladd how she got her information. She was bound by a promise never to mention the person's name. I didn't say it to her, but I may say it to you. I am afraid I have an idea of who the person was."

"No," Mrs. Ellmother obstinately asserted, "you can't possibly know who it was. How should you know?"

"Do you wish me to repeat what I heard in that room opposite when my aunt was dying?"

"Drop it, Miss Emily. For God's sake, drop it."

"I can't drop it. It's dreadful to me to have suspicions of my aunt, and no better reason for them than what she said in a state of delirium. Tell me, if you love me, was it her wandering fancy, or was it the truth?"

"As I hope to be saved, Miss Emily, I can only guess, as you do; I don't rightly know. My mistress trusted me half-way, as it were. I'm afraid I have a rough tongue of my own sometimes. I offended her, and from that time she kept her own counsel. What she did she did in the dark, so far as I was concerned."

"How did you offend her?"

"I shall be obliged to speak of your father if I tell you how."

"Speak of him."

"*He* was not to blame, mind that," Mrs. Ellmother said, earnestly. "If I wasn't certain of what I say now, you wouldn't get a word out of me. Good, harmless man, there's no denying it, he *was* in love with Miss Jethro! What's the matter?"

Emily was thinking of her memorable conversation with the disgraced teacher on her last night at school. "Nothing," she answered. "Go on."

"If he had not tried to keep it secret from us," Mrs. Ellmother resumed, "your aunt might never have taken it into her head that he was entangled in a love affair of the shameful sort. I don't deny that I helped her in her inquiries, but it was only because I felt sure from the first that the more she discovered, the more certainly my master's innocence would show itself. He used to go away and visit Miss Jethro privately. In the time when your aunt trusted me, we never could find out where. She made that discovery afterward for herself (I can't tell you how long afterward), and she spent money in employing mean wretches to pry into Miss Jethro's past life. She had (if you will excuse me for saying it) an old maid's hatred of the handsome young woman who lured your father away from home, and set up a secret (in a manner of speaking) between her brother and herself. I won't tell you how we looked at letters and other things which he forgot to leave under lock and key. I will only say there was one bit in a journal he kept which made me ashamed of myself. I read it out to Miss Letitia, and I told her, in so many words, not to count any more on me. No, I haven't got a copy of the words—I can remember them without a copy. 'Even if my religion did not forbid me to peril my soul by leading a life of sin with this woman whom I love'—that was how it began—'the thought of my daughter would keep me pure. No conduct of mine shall ever make me unworthy of my child's affection and respect.' There, I'm making you cry; I won't stay here any longer. All that I had to say has been said. Drop it—I say again, drop it! Nobody but Miss Ladd knows for certain whether your aunt was innocent or guilty in the matter of Miss Jethro's disgrace. Please to excuse me; my work's waiting down-stairs."

From time to time, as she pursued her domestic labors, Mrs. Ellmother thought of Mirabel. Hours on hours had passed, and the doctor had not appeared. Was he too busy even to spare a few minutes of his time? Or had the handsome little gentleman, after promising so fairly, failed to perform his errand?

Mrs. Ellmother's doubts had wronged Mirabel. He had engaged to return to the doctor's house, and he kept his word.

Dr. Allday was at home again, and was seeing patients. Introduced in his turn, Mirabel had no reason to complain of his reception. At the same time, after he had stated the object of his visit, something odd began to show itself in the doctor's manner.

He looked at Mirabel with an appearance of uneasy curiosity, and he contrived an excuse for altering the visitor's position in the room so that the light fell full on his face.

"I fancy I must have seen you," the doctor said, "at some former time."

"I am ashamed to say I don't remember it," Mirabel answered.

"Ah, very likely I'm wrong. I'll call on Miss Emily, sir, you may depend on it."

Left in his consulting-room, Dr. Allday failed to ring the bell which summoned the next patient who was waiting for him. He took his diary from the table drawer, and turned to the daily entries for the past month of July.

Arriving at the fifteenth day of the month, he glanced at the first lines of writing: "A visit from a mysterious lady, calling herself Miss Jethro. Our conference led to some very unexpected results."

No; that was not what he was in search of. He looked a little lower down, and read on regularly, from that point, as follows:

"Called on Miss Emily in great anxiety about the discoveries which she might make among her aunt's papers. Papers all destroyed, thank God, except the handbill offering a reward for discovery of the murderer, which she found in the scrap-book. Gave her back the handbill. Emily much surprised that the wretch should have escaped, with such a careful description of him circulated everywhere. She read the description aloud to me in her nice clear voice: 'Supposed age between twenty-five and thirty years. A well-made man of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean-shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers,' and so on. Emily at a loss to understand how the fugitive could disguise himself. Reminded her that he could effectually disguise his head and face (with time to help him) by letting his hair grow long, and cultivating his beard. Emily not convinced, even by this self-evident view of the case. Changed the subject."

He put away his diary, and rang the bell.

"Curious," he thought. "That dandified little clergyman has certainly reminded me of my discussion with Emily more than two months since. Was it his flowing hair, I wonder, or his splendid beard? Good God! suppose it should turn out—"

He was interrupted by the appearance of his patient. Other ailing people followed. Dr. Allday's mind was professionally occupied for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER LII.

"IF I COULD FIND A FRIEND!"

SHORTLY after Miss Ladd had taken her departure, a parcel arrived for Emily, bearing the name of a bookseller printed on the label. It was large, and it was heavy. "Reading enough, I should think, to last for a lifetime," Mrs. Ellmother remarked, after carrying the parcel upstairs.

Emily called her back as she was leaving the room. "I want to caution you," she said, "before Miss Wyvil comes. Don't tell her—don't tell anybody—how my father met his death. If other persons are taken into our confidence, they will talk of it. We don't know how near to me or to my friends the murderer may be. The slightest hint may put him on his guard."

"Oh, miss, are you still thinking of that!"

"I think of nothing else."

"Bad for your mind, Miss Emily—and bad for your body, as your looks

show. I wish you would take counsel with some discreet person before you move in this matter by yourself."

Emily sighed wearily. "In my situation, where is the person whom I can trust?"

"You can trust the good doctor."

"Can I? Perhaps I was wrong when I told you I wouldn't see him. He might be of some use to me."

Mrs. Ellmother made the most of this concession, in the fear that Emily might change her mind. "Dr. Allday may call on you to-morrow," she said.

"Do you mean that you have sent for him?"

"Don't be angry! I did it for the best—and Mr. Mirabel agreed with me."

"Mr. Mirabel! What have you told Mr. Mirabel?"

"Nothing, except that you are ill. When he heard that, he proposed to go to the doctor. He will be here again to-morrow, to ask for news of your health. Will you see him?"

"I don't know yet—I have other things to think of. Bring Miss Wyvil up here, when she comes."

"Am I to get the spare room ready for her?"

"No. She is staying with her father at the London house."

Emily made that reply almost with an air of relief. When Cecilia arrived, it was only by an effort that she could show grateful appreciation of the sympathy of her dearest friend. When the visit came to an end, she felt an ungrateful sense of freedom. The restraint was off her mind; she could think again of the one terrible subject that had any interest for her now. Over love, over friendship, over the natural enjoyment of her young life, predominated the blighting resolution which bound her to avenge her father's death. Her dearest remembrances of him—tender remembrances once—now burned in her (to use her own words) like fire. It was no ordinary love that had bound parent and child together in the by-gone time. Emily had grown from infancy to girlhood, owing all the brightness of her life—a life without a mother, without brothers, without sisters—to her father alone. To submit to lose this beloved, this only companion by the cruel stroke of disease was of all trials of resignation the hardest to bear. But to be severed from him by the murderous hand of a man was more than Emily's fervent nature could passively endure. Before the garden gate had closed on her friend she had returned to her one thought—she was breathing again her one aspiration. The books that she had ordered, with her own purpose in view—books that might supply her want of experience, and might reveal the perils which beset the course that lay before her—were unpacked and spread out on the table. Hour after hour, when the old servant believed that her mistress was in bed, she was absorbed over biographies in English and French which related the stratagems by means of which famous policemen had captured the worst criminals of their time. From these she turned to works of fiction which found their chief topic of interest in dwelling on the discovery of hidden crime. The night passed, and dawn glimmered through the window, and still she opened book after book with sinking courage, and still she gained nothing but the disheartening conviction of her inability to

carry out her own plans. Almost every page that she turned over revealed the immovable obstacles set in her way by her sex and her age. Could *she* mix with the people, visit the scenes familiar to the fearful experience of men (in fact and in fiction) who had traced the homicide to his hiding-place, and had marked him among his harmless fellow-creatures with the brand of Cain? No! A young girl following, or attempting to follow, that career, must reckon with insult and outrage paying their abominable tribute to her youth and her beauty at every turn. What proportion would the men who might respect her bear to the men who might make her the object of advances which it was hardly possible to imagine without shuddering. She crept exhausted to her bed, the most helpless, hopeless creature on the wide surface of the earth—a girl self-devoted to the task of a man.

Careful to perform his promise to Mirabel without delay, the doctor called on Emily early in the morning, before the hour at which he usually entered his consulting-room.

"Well, what's the matter with the young mistress?" he asked, in his most abrupt manner, when Mrs. Ellmother opened the door. "Is it love, or jealousy, or a new dress with a wrinkle in it?"

"You will hear about it, sir, from Miss Emily herself. I am forbidden to say anything."

"But you mean to say something, for all that."

"Don't joke, Dr. Allday. The state of things here is a great deal too serious for joking. Make up your mind to be surprised. I say no more."

Before the doctor could ask what this meant, Emily opened the parlor door.

"Come in," she said, impatiently.

Dr. Allday's first greeting was strictly professional. "My dear child, I never expected this," he began. "You are looking wretchedly ill." He attempted to feel her pulse. She drew her hand away from him.

"It's my mind that's ill," she answered. "Feeling my pulse won't cure me of anxiety and distress. I want advice; I want help. Dear old doctor, you have always been a good friend to me, be a better friend than ever now."

"What can I do?"

"Promise you will keep secret what I am going to say to you, and listen, pray listen patiently, till I have done."

Dr. Allday promised and listened. He had been, in some degree at least, prepared for a surprise, but the disclosure which now burst on him was more than his equanimity could sustain. He looked at Emily in silent dismay. She had surprised and shocked him, not only by what she said, but by what she unconsciously suggested. The doubt that had occurred to him when he saw Mirabel for the first time was now inevitably recalled to his memory. Was it possible that the man had produced the same impression on Emily's mind? His first impulse, when he was composed enough to speak, urged him to put the question to her cautiously.

"If you happened to meet with the suspected person," he said, "have you any means of identifying him?"

"None whatever, doctor. If you would only think it over—"

He stopped her there, convinced of the danger of encouraging her, and resolved to act on his conviction. "I have enough to occupy me in my profession," he said. "Ask your other friend to think it over."

"What other friend?"

"Mr. Alban Morris."

The moment he pronounced the name he saw that he had touched on some painful association. "Has Mr. Morris refused to help you?" he inquired.

"I have not asked him to help me."

"Why?"

There was no choice (with such a man as Dr. Allday) between offending him or answering him. Emily adopted the latter alternative. On this occasion she had no reason to complain of his silence.

"Your view of Mr. Morris's conduct surprises me," he replied—"surprises me more than I can say," he added, remembering that he too was guilty of having kept her in ignorance of the truth, out of regard—mistaken regard, as it now seemed to be—for her peace of mind.

"Be good to me, and pass it over if I am wrong," Emily said. "I can't dispute with you; I can only tell you what I feel. You have always been kind to me—may I count on your kindness still?"

Dr. Allday relapsed into silence.

"May I at least ask," she went on, "if you know anything of persons—" She paused, discouraged by the cold expression of inquiry in the old man's eyes as he looked at her.

"What persons?" he said.

"Persons whom I suspect."

"Name them."

Emily named the landlady of the inn at Zeeland: she could now place the right interpretation on Mrs. Rook's conduct when the locket had been put into her hand at Netherwoods. Dr. Allday answered shortly and stiffly: he had never even seen Mrs. Rook. Emily mentioned Miss Jethro next, and saw at once that she had interested him.

"What do you suspect Miss Jethro of doing?" he asked.

"I suspect her of knowing more of my father's death than she is willing to acknowledge," Emily replied.

The doctor's manner altered for the better. "I agree with you," he said, frankly. "But I have some knowledge of that lady. I warn you not to waste time and trouble in trying to discover the weak side of Miss Jethro."

"That was not my experience of her at school," Emily rejoined. "At the same time, I don't know what may have happened since those days. I may perhaps have lost the place I once held in her regard."

"How?"

"Through my aunt."

"Through your aunt?"

"I hope and trust I am wrong," Emily continued; "but I fear my aunt had something to do with Miss Jethro's dismissal from the school—and in that case Miss Jethro may have found it out." Her eyes, resting on the doctor, suddenly brightened. "You know something about it!" she exclaimed.

He considered a little—whether he should or should not tell her of the

letter addressed by Miss Ladd to Miss Letitia, which he had found at the cottage.

"If I could satisfy you that your fears are well founded," he asked, "would the discovery keep you away from Miss Jethro?"

"I should be ashamed to speak to her—even if we met."

"Very well. I can tell you positively that your aunt was the person who turned Miss Jethro out of the school. When I get home I will send you a letter that proves it."

Emily's head sank on her breast. "Why do I only hear of this now?" she said.

"Because I had no reason for letting you know of it before to-day. If I have done nothing else, I have at least succeeded in keeping you and Miss Jethro apart."

Emily looked at him in alarm. He went on without appearing to notice that he had startled her. "I wish to God I could as easily put a stop to the mad project which you are contemplating!"

"The mad project?" Emily repeated. "Oh, do you cruelly leave me to myself at the time of all others when I am most in need of your sympathy?"

That appeal moved him. He spoke more gently; he pitied while he condemned her.

"My poor dear child, I should be cruel indeed if I encouraged you. You are giving yourself up to an enterprise so shockingly unsuited to a young girl like you that I declare I contemplate it with horror. Think, I entreat you—think; and let me hear that you have yielded, not to my poor entreaties, but to your own better sense." His voice faltered, his eyes moistened. "I shall make a fool of myself," he burst out furiously, "if I stay here any longer. Good-by."

He left her.

She walked to the window, and looked out at the fair morning. No one to feel for her—no one to understand her—nothing nearer that could speak to poor mortality of hope and encouragement than the bright heaven, so far away! She turned from the window. "The sun shines on the murderer," she thought, "as it shines on me."

She sat down at the table and tried to quiet her mind—to think steadily to some good purpose. Of the few friends that she possessed, every one had declared that she was in the wrong. Had *they* lost the one loved being of all beings on earth, and lost him by the hand of a homicide—and that homicide free? All that was faithful, all that was devoted, in the girl's nature held her to her desperate resolution as with a hand of iron. If she shrank at that miserable moment, it was not from her design—it was from the sense of her own helplessness. "Oh, if I had been a man!" she said to herself. "Oh, if I could find a friend!"

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FRIEND FOUND.

Mrs. ELLMOTHE looked into the parlor. "I told you Mr. Mirabel would call again," she announced. "Here he is."

"Has he asked to see me?"

"He leaves it entirely to you."

For a moment, and a moment only, Emily was undecided. "Show him in," she said.

Mirabel's embarrassment was visible the moment he entered the room. For the first time in his life—in the presence of a woman—the popular preacher was shy. He who had taken hundreds of fair hands with sympathetic pressure—he who had offered fluent consolation, abroad and at home, to beauty in distress—was conscious of a rising color, and was absolutely at a loss for words, when Emily received him. And yet, though he appeared at disadvantage—and, worse still, though he was conscious of it himself—there was nothing contemptible in his look and manner. His silence and confusion revealed a change in him which inspired respect. Love had developed this spoiled darling of foolish congregations, this effeminate pet of drawing-rooms and boudoirs, into a Man—and no woman, in Emily's position, could have failed to see that it was love which she herself had inspired.

Equally ill at ease, they both took refuge in the commonplace phrases suggested by the occasion. These exhausted, there was a pause. Mirabel alluded to Cecilia, as a means of continuing the conversation.

"Have you seen Miss Wyvil?" he inquired.

"She was here last night; and I expect to see her again to-day, before she returns to Monksmoor with her father. Do you go back with them?"

"Yes—if *you* do."

"I remain in London."

"Then I remain in London too."

The strong feeling that was in him had forced its way to expression at last. In happier days—when she had persistently refused to let him speak to her seriously—she would have been ready with a light-hearted reply. She was silent now. Mirabel pleaded with her not to misunderstand him by an honest confession of his motives, which presented him under a new aspect. The easy, plausible man, who had hardly ever seemed to be in earnest before, meant, seriously meant, what he said now.

"May I try to explain myself?" he asked.

"Certainly—if you wish it."

"Pray don't suppose me capable," Mirabel said, earnestly, "of presuming to pay you a compliment. I can not think of you, alone and in trouble, without feeling anxiety which can only be relieved in one way—I must be near enough to hear of you day by day. Not by repeating this visit. Unless you wish it, I will not again cross the threshold of your door. Mrs. Ellmother will tell me if your mind is more at ease; Mrs. Ellmother will tell me if there is any new trial of your fortitude. She needn't even mention that I have been speaking to her at the door; and she may be sure, and you may be sure, that I shall ask no inquisitive questions. I can feel for you in your misfortune, without wishing to know what that misfortune is. If I can ever be of the smallest use, think of me as your other servant. Say to Mrs. Ellmother, 'I want him'—and say no more."

Where is the woman who could have resisted such devotion as this—inspired, truly inspired, by herself? Emily's eyes softened as she answered him.

"You little know how your kindness touches me," she said.

"Don't speak of my kindness until you have tried me," he interposed. "And let me repeat that I don't ask to enter into your secrets. Tell me one thing only: Do you see a way out of your trouble, if you have the resolution to take it?"

"I do."

"Can a friend (such a friend as I am, I mean) be of any use?"

"Of the greatest use if I could feel justified in trying you."

"I entreat you to try me."

"But, Mr. Mirabel, you don't know what I am thinking of. I may be wrong. My friends all say I *am* wrong."

"I don't care what your friends say; I don't care about any earthly thing but your tranquillity. Does your dog ask whether you are right or wrong? I am your dog. I think of you, and I think of nothing else."

She looked back through the experience of the last few days. Miss Ladd—Mrs. Ellmother—Dr. Allday: not one of them had felt for her, not one of them had spoken to her, as this man had felt and had spoken. She remembered the dreadful sense of solitude and helplessness which had wrung her heart in the interval before Mirabel came in. Her father himself could hardly have been kinder to her than this friend of a few weeks only. She looked at him through her tears; she could say nothing that was eloquent, nothing even that was adequate. "You are very good to me," was her only acknowledgment of all that he had offered. How poor it seemed to be! and how much it meant!

He rose, saying considerably that he would leave her to recover herself, and would wait to hear from Mrs. Ellmother if he was wanted. She stopped him before he could get to the door.

"No," she said, "I must not let you go. In common gratitude I ought to decide, and I will decide, before you leave me. I should be unworthy of your generosity if I hesitated to take you into my confidence. But let me appeal first—for your sake, not for mine—to your experience of the world." She paused; her color rose a little. "I shall have to ask you very often to speak with me," she resumed; "and for serious reasons, which you will presently know, we must be alone. Is it possible (you are better able to judge than I am) that your character may suffer in the estimation of some of your friends? I know how unselfishly you offer me your help; I know you speak to me as a brother might speak to a sister—"

"No, Miss Emily, I can't honestly claim to do that. And—may I venture to remind you?—you know why."

She started. Her eyes rested on him with a momentary expression of reproach.

"Is it quite fair," she asked, "in my situation, to say that?"

"Would it have been quite fair," he rejoined, "to allow you to deceive yourself? Should I deserve to be taken into your confidence if I encouraged you to trust me under false pretenses? Not a word more of those hopes on which the happiness of my life depends shall pass my lips unless you permit it. Let the world think what it may of me, and say what it may of me! I should despise myself if I allowed that consideration to have the slightest influence, except when I think of you. The little world about us may take it for granted that I am more favored than I can per-

haps ever hope to be; the little world about us doesn't know that another happier man is an object of interest to you—"

"Stop, Mr. Mirabel! The person to whom you refer has no such claim on me as you suppose."

"Dare I say how happy I am to hear it? Will you forgive me?"

"I will forgive you if you say no more."

Their eyes met. Completely overcome by the new hope that she had inspired, Mirabel was unable to answer her. His sensitive nerves trembled under emotion like the nerves of a woman; his delicate complexion faded away slowly into whiteness. Emily was alarmed—he seemed to be on the point of fainting. She ran to the window to open it more widely.

"Pray don't trouble yourself," he said; "I am easily agitated by any sudden sensation, and I am a little overcome by my own happiness."

"Let me give you a glass of wine."

"Thank you; I don't need it indeed."

"You really feel better?"

"I feel quite well again, and eager to hear how I can serve you."

"It's a long story, Mr. Mirabel, and a dreadful story."

"Dreadful?"

"Yes! Let me tell you first how you can serve me. I am in search of a man who has done me the cruellest wrong that one human creature can inflict on another. But the chances are all against me—I am only a woman; and I don't know how to take even the first step toward discovery."

"You will know when I guide you."

He reminded her tenderly of what she might expect from him, and was rewarded by a grateful look. Seeing nothing, suspecting nothing, they advanced together nearer and nearer to the unknown end.

"Once or twice," Emily resumed, "I spoke to you of my poor father when we were at Monksmoor, and I must speak of him again. You could have no interest in inquiring about a stranger; and you can not have heard how my father died."

"Pardon me, I heard from Mr. Wyvil that he died of heart-complaint."

"You heard what I had told Mr. Wyvil," Emily said. "I was wrong."

"Wrong about your father's death!" Mirabel exclaimed, in tones of courteous surprise.

"Mr. Mirabel, I have been deceived about my father's death; and I have only discovered it a few days since."

At the impending moment of the frightful shock which she was innocently about to inflict on him, she hesitated, doubtful whether it would be best to relate how the discovery had been made, or to pass at once to the result. She decided on passing to the result.

"You shall hear directly how I found out that I had been deceived," she went on; "I will tell you the horrid truth first."

He was so immeasurably far away from the faintest suspicion of what was coming that he begged her to spare herself. "It will only distress you," he pleaded, "to dwell on your father's death."

"Distress me?" she repeated. "His death will madden me, if I fail to avenge it!"

"Oh, don't say that!"

"I must say it!—I will say it! My father died murdered at Zeeland; and the man you must help me to find is the wretch who killed him."

She started to her feet with a cry of terror. Mirabel dropped from his chair senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER LIV.

MIRABEL SEES HIS WAY.

EMILY recovered her presence of mind. She opened the door so as to make a draught of air in the room, and called for water. Returning to Mirabel, she loosened his cravat. Mrs. Ellmother came in just in time to prevent her from committing a common error in the treatment of fainting persons, by raising Mirabel's head. The current of air and the sprinkling of water over his face soon produced their customary effect. "He'll come round directly," Mrs. Ellmother remarked. "Your aunt was sometimes taken with these swoons, miss, and I know something about them. He looks a poor weak creature in spite of his big beard. Has anything frightened him?"

Emily little knew how correctly that chance guess had hit on the truth! "Nothing can possibly have frightened him," she replied. "I am afraid he is in bad health. He turned suddenly pale while we were talking, and I thought he was going to be taken ill; he made light of it, and seemed to recover. Unfortunately I was right; it was the threatening of a fainting fit—he dropped on the floor a minute afterward."

A sigh fluttered over Mirabel's lips. His eyes opened, looked at Mrs. Ellmother in vacant terror, and closed again. Emily whispered to her to leave the room. The old woman smiled satirically as she opened the door, then looked back with a sudden change of humor. To see the kind young mistress bending over the feeble little clergyman set her—by some strange association of ideas—thinking of Alban Morris. "Ah," she muttered to herself, on her way out, "I call *him* a Man!"

There was wine in the sideboard—the wine which Emily had once already offered in vain. Mirabel drank it eagerly this time. He looked round the room as if he wished to be sure that they were alone. "Have I fallen to a low place in your estimation?" he asked, smiling faintly. "I am afraid you will think poorly enough of your new ally after this?"

"I only think you should take more care of your health," Emily replied, with sincere interest in his recovery. "Let me leave you to rest on the sofa."

He refused to remain at the cottage; he asked, with a sudden change to fretfulness, if she would let her servant get him a cab. She ventured to doubt whether he was quite strong enough yet to go away by himself. He reiterated, piteously reiterated, his request. A passing cab was stopped directly. Emily accompanied him to the gate. "I know what to do," he said, in a hurried, absent way. "Rest and a little tonic medicine will soon set me right." The clammy coldness of his skin made Emily shudder as they shook hands. "You won't think the worse of me for this?" he asked.

"How can you imagine such a thing!" she answered, warmly.

"Will you see me if I come to-morrow?"

"I shall be anxious to see you." So they parted. Emily returned to the house, pitying him with all her heart.

Reaching the hotel at which he was accustomed to stay when he was in London, Mirabel locked the door of his room. He looked at the houses on the opposite side of the street. His mind was in such a state of morbid distrust that he lowered the blind over the window. In solitude and obscurity the miserable wretch sat down in a corner, and covered his face with his hands, and tried to realize what had happened to him.

Nothing had been said, at the fatal interview with Emily, which could have given him the slightest warning of what was to come. Her father's name—absolutely unknown to him when he fled from the inn—had only been communicated to the public by the newspaper reports of the adjourned inquest. At the time when those reports appeared he was in hiding, under circumstances which prevented him from seeing a newspaper. Some days later he had met with the person who assisted him in escaping from England. That person might have mentioned—probably did mention—the name of the dead man. But Mirabel (with the officers of justice at his heels) was prostrated by such a panic of terror that he was incapable of understanding anything that was said to him. He remembered being laid, half dead, in a berth on board a vessel; being landed at a French port the same day, alone among strangers—and he remembered nothing more. No exercise of discretion on his part could have extricated him from the terrible position in which he was now placed. He stood pledged to Emily to discover the man suspected of the murder of her father; and that man was—himself!

What refuge was left open to him?

If he took to flight, his sudden disappearance would be a suspicious circumstance in itself, and would therefore provoke inquiries which might lead to serious results. Supposing that he overlooked the risk thus presented, would he be capable of enduring a separation from Emily, which might be a separation for life? Even in the first horror of discovering his situation, her influence remained unshaken—the animating spirit of the one manly capacity for resistance which raised him above the reach of his own fears. The only prospect before him which he felt himself to be incapable of contemplating was the prospect of leaving Emily.

Having arrived at this decision, fear urged him to consider the necessity of providing for his own safety.

The first precaution to adopt was to separate Emily from friends whose advice might be hostile to his interests—perhaps even subversive of his security. To effect this design he had need of an ally whom he could trust. That ally was at his disposal, far away in the north.

At the time when Francine's jealousy began to interfere with all freedom of intercourse between Emily and himself, at Monksmoor, he had contemplated making arrangements which might enable them to meet at the house of his invalid sister, Mrs. Delvin. He had spoken of her, and of the bodily affliction which confined her to her room, in terms which had already interested Emily. In the present emergency he decided on returning to the subject, and on hastening the meeting between the two women which

ended at Mr. Wyvil's country-seat.

set in carrying out this intention. He wrote to Mrs.

Delvin by that day's post, confiding to her, in the first place, the critical position in which he now found himself. This done, he proceeded as follows:

"To your sound judgment, dearest Agatha, it may appear that I am making myself needlessly uneasy about the future. Two persons only know that I am the man who escaped from the inn at Zeeland. You are one of them, and Miss Jethro is the other. On you I can absolutely rely; and, after my experience of her, I ought not to doubt Miss Jethro. I admit this; but I can not get over my distrust of Emily's friends.

"Besides the doctor (whom I have already mentioned), there are two other men, whom you know through our correspondence, and who feel a strong interest in her—Mr. Wyvil and Mr. Alban Morris. This last, I am rejoiced to say, is no longer in my way as a rival—Emily has discarded him. But he is still formidable, as an enemy who will be glad to ruin me in her estimation, if he can.

"I want you, my dear, to invite Emily to be your guest, and so to separate her from these friends. The old servant who attends on her will be included in the invitation, of course. Mrs. Ellmother is, as I believe, devoted to the interests of Mr. Alban Morris: she will be well out of the way of doing mischief while we have her safe in your northern solitude.

"There is no fear that Emily will refuse your invitation.

"In the first place, she is already interested in you. In the second place, I shall consider the small proprieties of social life, and instead of travelling with her to your house, I shall follow by a later train. In the third place, I am now the chosen adviser in whom she trusts, and what I tell her to do she will do. It pains me, really and truly pains me, to be compelled to deceive her; but the other alternative is to reveal myself as the wretch of whom she is in search. Was there ever such a situation? And oh, Agatha, I am so fond of her! If I fail to persuade her to be my wife, I don't care what becomes of me. I used to think disgrace, and death on the scaffold, the most frightful prospect that a man can contemplate. In my present frame of mind, a life without Emily may just as well end in that way as in any other. When we are together in your old sea-beaten tower, do your best, my dear, to incline the heart of this sweet girl toward me. If she remains in London, how do I know that Mr. Morris may not recover the place he has lost in her good opinion? The bare idea of it turns me cold.

"There is one more point on which I must touch before I can finish my letter.

"When you last wrote you told me that Sir Jervis Redwood was not expected to live much longer, and that the establishment would be broken up after his death. Can you find out for me what will become, under these circumstances, of Mr. and Mrs. Rook? So far as I am concerned, I don't doubt that the alteration in my personal appearance, which has protected me for years past, may be trusted to preserve me from recognition by these two people. But it is of the utmost importance, remembering the project to which Emily has devoted herself, that she should not meet with Mrs. Rook. They have been already in correspondence; and Mrs. Rook has expressed an intention (if the opportunity offers itself) of calling at

the cottage. Another reason, and a pressing reason, for removing Emily from London! We can easily keep the Rooks out of *your* house; but I own I should feel more at my ease if I heard that they had left Northumberland."

With that confession, Mrs. Delvin's brother closed his letter.

CHAPTER LV.

ALBAN SEES HIS WAY.

DURING the first days of Mirabel's sojourn at his hotel in London, events were in progress at Netherwoods affecting the interests of the man who was the especial object of his distrust. Not long after Miss Ladd had returned to her school she heard of an artist who was capable of filling the place to be vacated by Alban Morris. It was then the twenty-third of the month. In four days more the new master would be ready to enter on his duties, and Alban would be at liberty.

On the twenty-fourth Alban received a telegram which startled him. The person sending the message was Mrs. Ellmother, and the words were: "Meet me at your railway station to-day, at two o'clock."

He found her in the waiting-room, and he met with a rough reception.

"Minutes are precious, Mr. Morris," she said; "you are two minutes late. The next train to London stops here in half an hour, and I must go back by it."

"Good heavens! what brings you here? Is Emily—"

"Emily is well enough in health, if that's what you mean. As to why I come here, the reason is that it's a deal easier for me—worse luck!—to take this journey than to write a letter. One good turn deserves another. I don't forget how kind you were to me, away there at the school, and I can't and won't see what's going on at the cottage behind your back without letting you know of it. Oh, you needn't be alarmed about *her*! I've made an excuse to get away for a few hours—but I haven't left her by herself. Miss Wyvil has come to London again, and Mr. Mirabel spends the best part of his time with her. Excuse me for a moment, will you? I'm so thirsty after the journey I can hardly speak."

She presented herself at the counter in the waiting-room. "I'll trouble you, young woman, for a glass of ale." She returned to Alban in a better humor. "It's not bad stuff, that! When I have said my say, I'll have a drop more—just to wash the taste of Mr. Mirabel out of my mouth. Wait a bit; I have something to ask you. How much longer are you obliged to stop here, teaching the girls to draw?"

"I leave Netherwoods in three days more," Alban replied.

"That's all right! You may be in time to bring Miss Emily to her senses yet."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—if you don't stop it—she will marry the parson."

"I can't believe it, Mrs. Ellmother! I won't believe it!"

"Ah, it's a comfort to him, poor fellow, to say that! Look here, Mr. Morris, this is how it stands. You're in disgrace with Miss Emily, and he

profits by it. I was fool enough to take a liking to Mr. Mirabel when I first opened the door to him; I know better now. He got on the blind side of me, and now he has got on the blind side of *her*. Shall I tell you how? By doing what you would have done if you had had the chance. He's helping her—or pretending to help her, I don't know which—to find the man who murdered poor Mr. Brown. After four years! And when all the police in England—with a reward to encourage them—did their best, and it came to nothing."

"Never mind that!" Alban said, impatiently. "I want to know how Mr. Mirabel is helping her."

"That's more than I can tell you. You don't suppose they take me into their confidence? All I can do is to pick up a word here and there, when fine weather tempts them out into the garden. She tells him to suspect Mrs. Rook, and to make inquiries after Miss Jethro. And he has his plans; and he writes them down, which is dead against his doing anything useful, in my opinion. I don't hold with your scribblers. At the same time I wouldn't count too positively, in your place, on his being likely to fail. That little Mirabel—if it wasn't for his beard I should believe he was a woman, and a sickly woman too; he fainted in our house the other day—that little Mirabel is in earnest. Rather than leave Miss Emily from Saturday to Monday, he has got a parson out of employment to do his Sunday work for him. And, what's more, he has persuaded her—for some reasons of his own—to leave London next week."

"Is she going back to Monksmoor?"

"Not she. Mr. Mirabel has got a sister, a widow lady; she's a cripple, or something of the sort. Her name is Mrs. Delvin. She lives far away in the north country by the sea, and Miss Emily is going to stay with her."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure? I've seen the letter."

"Do you mean the letter of invitation?"

"Yes, I do. Miss Emily herself showed it to me. I'm to go with her—in attendance on my mistress,' as the lady puts it. This I will say for Mrs. Delvin: her handwriting is a credit to the school that taught her; and the poor bedridden creature words her invitation so nicely that I myself couldn't have resisted it—and I'm a hard one, as you know. You don't seem to heed me, Mr. Morris."

"I beg your pardon, I was thinking."

"Thinking of what, if I may make so bold?"

"Of going back to London with you, instead of waiting till the new master comes to take my place."

"Don't do that, sir. You would do harm instead of good if you showed yourself at the cottage now. Besides, it would not be fair to Miss Ladd to leave her before the other man takes your girls off your hands. Trust me to look after your interests; and don't go near Miss Emily—don't even write to her—unless you have got something to say about the murder, which she will be eager to hear. Make some discovery in that direction, Mr. Morris, while the parson is only trying to do it or pretending to do it, and I'll answer for the result. Look at the clock. In ten minutes more the train will be here. My memory isn't as good as it was, but I do think I have told you all I had to tell."

"You are the best of good friends!" Alban said, warmly.

"Never mind about that, sir. If you want to do a friendly thing in return, tell me if you know what has become of Miss De Sor."

"She has returned to Netherwoods."

"Aha! Miss Ladd is as good as her word. Would you mind writing to tell me of it if Miss De Sor leaves the school again? Good Lord! there she is on the platform, with bag and baggage. Don't let her see me, Mr. Morris. If she comes in here I shall set the marks of my ten finger-nails on that false face of hers, as sure as I am a Christian woman."

Alban placed himself at the door so as to hide Mrs. Ellmother. There indeed was Francine, accompanied by one of the teachers at the school. She took a seat on the bench outside the booking office, in a state of sullen indifference—absorbed in herself—noticing nothing. Urged by ungovernable curiosity, Mrs. Ellmother stole on tiptoe to Alban's side to look at her. To a person acquainted with the circumstances there could be no possible doubt of what had happened. Francine had failed to excuse herself, and had been dismissed from Miss Ladd's house.

"I would have travelled to the world's end," Mrs. Ellmother said, "to see *that*!"

She returned to her place in the waiting-room, perfectly satisfied.

The teacher noticed Alban, on leaving the booking office after taking the tickets. "I shall be glad," she said, looking toward Francine, "when I have resigned the charge of that young lady to the person who is to receive her in London."

"Is she to be sent back to her parents?" Alban asked.

"We don't know yet. Miss Ladd will write to San Domingo by the next mail. In the mean time her father's agent in London—the same person who pays her allowance—takes care of her until he hears from the West Indies."

"Does she consent to this?"

"She doesn't seem to care what becomes of her. Miss Ladd has given her every opportunity of explaining and excusing herself, and has produced no impression. You can see the state she is in. Our good mistress—always hopeful even in the worst cases, as you know—thinks she is feeling ashamed of herself, and is too proud and self-willed to own it. My own idea is that some secret disappointment is weighing on her mind. Perhaps I am wrong."

No. Miss Ladd was wrong, and the teacher was right.

The passion of revenge, being essentially selfish in its nature, is of all passions the narrowest in its range of view. In gratifying her jealous hatred of Emily, Francine had correctly foreseen consequences as they might affect the other object of her enmity—Alban Morris. But she had failed to perceive the imminent danger of another result, which in a calmer frame of mind might not have escaped discovery. In triumphing over Emily and Alban, she had been the indirect means of inflicting on herself the bitterest of all disappointments—she had brought Emily and Mirabel together. The first forewarning of this catastrophe had reached her, on hearing that Mirabel would not return to Monksmoor. Her worst fears had been thereafter confirmed by a letter from Cecilia, which had followed her to Netherwoods. From that moment she, who had made others

wretched, paid the penalty in suffering as keen as any that she had inflicted. Completely prostrated, powerless, through ignorance of his address in London, to make a last appeal to Mirabel, she was literally, as had just been said, careless what became of her. When the train approached, she sprang to her feet, advanced to the edge of the platform, and suddenly drew back, shuddering. The teacher looked in terror at Alban. Had the desperate girl meditated throwing herself under the wheels of the engine? The thought had been in both their minds, but neither of them acknowledged it. Francine stepped quietly into the carriage, when the train drew up, and laid her head back in a corner, and closed her eyes. Mrs. Ellmother took her place in another compartment, and beckoned to Alban to speak to her at the window.

"Where can I see you, when you go to London?" she asked.

"At Dr. Allday's house."

"On what day?"

"On Tuesday next."

CHAPTER LVI.

APPROACHING THE END.

ALBAN reached London early enough in the afternoon to find the doctor at his luncheon. "Too late to see Mrs. Ellmother," he announced. "Sit down and have something to eat."

"Has she left any message for me?"

"A message, my good friend, that you won't like to hear. She is off with her mistress this morning on a visit to Mr. Mirabel's sister."

"Does he go with them?"

"No; he follows by a later train."

"Has Mrs. Ellmother mentioned the address?"

"There it is, in her own handwriting."

Alban read the address: "Mrs. Delvin, The Clink, Belford, Northumberland."

"Turn to the back of that bit of paper," the doctor said. "Mrs. Ellmother has written something on it."

She had written these words: "No discoveries made by Mr. Mirabel up to this time. Sir Jervis Redwood is dead. The Rooks are believed to be in Scotland; and Miss Emily, if need be, is to help the parson to find them. No news of Miss Jethro."

"Now you have got your information," Dr. Allday resumed, "let me have a look at you. You're not in a rage: that's a good sign to begin with."

"I am not the less determined," Alban answered.

"To bring Emily to her senses?" the doctor asked.

"To do what Mirabel has *not* done—and then to let her choose between us."

"Ay, ay. Your good opinion of her hasn't altered, though she has treated you so badly?"

"My good opinion makes allowance for the state of my poor darling's mind, after the shock that has fallen on her," Alban answered, quietly. "She is not *my* Emily now. She will be *my* Emily yet. I told her I was

convinced of it, in the old days at school, and my conviction is as strong as ever. Have you seen her since I have been away at Netherwoods?"

"Yes; and she is as angry with me as she is with you."

"For the same reason?"

"No, no. I heard enough to warn me to hold my tongue. I refused to help her—that's all. You are a man, and you may run risks which no young girl ought to encounter. Do you remember when I asked you to drop all further inquiries into the murder for Emily's sake? The circumstances have altered since that time. Can I be of any use?"

"Of the greatest use, if you can give me Miss Jethro's address."

"Oh! You mean to begin in that way, do you?"

"Yes. You know that Miss Jethro visited me at Netherwoods?"

"Go on."

"She showed me your answer to a letter which she had written to you. Have you got that letter?"

The doctor produced it. The address was, "Post-office, Swanage, Dorsetshire." Alban copied it in his pocket-book. Looking up, when he had done, he saw Dr. Allday's eyes fixed on him with an oddly mingled expression—partly of sympathy, partly of hesitation.

"Have you anything to suggest?" he asked.

"You will get nothing out of Miss Jethro," the doctor answered, "unless—" There he stopped.

"Unless what?"

"Unless you can frighten her."

"How am I to do that?"

After a little reflection Dr. Allday returned, without any apparent reason, to the subject of his last visit to Emily.

"There was one thing she said, in the course of our talk," he continued, "which struck me as being sensible, possibly (for we are all more or less conceited) because I agreed with her myself. She suspects Miss Jethro of knowing more about that damnable murder than Miss Jethro is willing to acknowledge. If you want to produce the right effect on her—" He looked hard at Alban, and checked himself once more.

"Well, what am I to do?"

"Tell her you have an idea of who the murderer is."

"But I have no idea."

"But I have."

"Good God! what do you mean?"

"Don't mistake me. An impression has been produced on my mind—that's all. Call it a freak of fancy, worth trying, perhaps, as a bold experiment, and worth nothing more. Come a little nearer. My housekeeper is an excellent woman, but I have once or twice caught her rather too near to that door. I think I'll whisper it."

He did so. In wonder Alban heard of the doubt which had crossed Dr. Allday's mind on the evening when Mirabel had called at his house.

"You look as if you didn't believe it," the doctor remarked.

"I'm thinking of Emily. For her sake, I hope and trust you are wrong. Ought I to go to her at once? I don't know what to do!"

"Find out first, my good fellow, whether I am right or wrong. You can do it if you will run the risk with Miss Jethro."

Alban recovered himself. His old friend's advice was clearly the right advice to follow. He examined his railway guide, and then looked at his watch. "If I can find Miss Jethro," he answered, "I'll risk it before the day is out."

The doctor accompanied him to the door. "You will write to me, won't you?"

"Without fail. Thank you, and good-by."

BOOK THE SIXTH.—THE CLINK.

CHAPTER LVII.

A COUNCIL OF TWO.

EARLY in the last century one of the picturesque race of robbers and murderers, practicing the vices of humanity on the border-lands watered by the river Tweed, built a tower of stone on the coast of Northumberland. He lived joyously in the perpetration of atrocities, and he died penitent, under the direction of his priest. Since that event he has figured in poems and pictures, and has been greatly admired by modern ladies and gentlemen, whom he would have outraged and robbed if he had been lucky enough to meet with them in the good old times.

His son succeeded him, and failed to profit by the paternal example: that is to say, he made the fatal mistake of fighting for other people instead of fighting for himself.

In the rebellion of 'Forty-five, this northern squire sided to serious purpose with Prince Charles and the Highlanders. He lost his head, and his children lost their inheritance. In the lapse of years he confiscated property fell into the hands of strangers, the last of whom (having a taste for the turf) discovered, in course of time, that he was in want of money. A retired merchant, named Delvin (originally of French extraction), took a liking to the wild situation, and purchased the tower. His wife—already in failing health—had been ordered by the doctors to live a quiet life by the sea. Her husband's death left her a rich and lonely widow; by day and night alike a prisoner in her room; wasted by disease, and having but two interests which reconciled her to life—writing poetry in the intervals of pain, and paying the debts of a reverend brother who succeeded in the pulpit, and prospered nowhere else.

In the later days of its life the tower had been greatly improved as a place of residence. The contrast was remarkable between the dreary gray outer walls and the luxuriously furnished rooms inside, rising by two at a time to the lofty eighth story of the building. Among the scattered populace of the country round, the tower was still known by the odd name given to it in the by-gone time—"The Clink." It had been so called (as was supposed) in allusion to the noise made by loose stones, washed backward and forward at certain times of the tide, in hollows of the rock on which the building stood.

On the evening of her arrival at Mrs. Delvin's retreat, Emily retired at an early hour, fatigued by her long journey. Mirabel had an opportunity of speaking with his sister privately in her own room.

"Send me away, Agatha, if I disturb you," he said, "and let me know when I can see you in the morning."

"My dear Miles, have you forgotten that I am never able to sleep in calm weather? My lullaby for years past has been the moaning of the great North Sea under my window. Listen! There is not a sound outside on this peaceful night. It is the right time of the tide, just now, and yet 'the clink' is not to be heard. Is the moon up?"

Mirabel opened the curtains. "The whole sky is one great abyss of black," he answered. "If I was superstitious, I should think that horrid darkness a bad omen for the future. Are you suffering, Agatha?"

"Not just now. I suppose I look sadly changed for the worse since you saw me last?"

But for the feverish brightness of her eyes, she would have looked like a corpse. Her wrinkled forehead, her hollow cheeks, her white lips, told their terrible tale of the suffering of years. The ghastly appearance of her face was heightened by the furnishing of the room. This doomed woman, dying slowly day by day, delighted in bright colors and sumptuous materials. The paper on the walls, the curtains, the carpet, presented the hues of the rainbow. She lay on a couch covered with purple silk, under draperies of green velvet to keep her warm. Rich lace hid her scanty hair, turning prematurely gray; brilliant rings glittered on her bony fingers. The room was in a blaze of light from lamps and candles. Even the wine at her side that kept her alive had been decanted into a bottle of lustrous Venetian glass. "My grave is open," she used to say, "and I want all these beautiful things to keep me from looking at it. I should die at once if I was left in the dark."

Her brother sat by the couch, thinking. "Shall I guess what is in your mind?" she asked.

Mirabel humored the caprice of the moment. "Guess!" he said.

"You want to know what I think of Emily," she answered. "Your letter told me you were in love; but I didn't believe your letter. I have always doubted whether you were capable of feeling true love—until I saw Emily. The moment she entered the room I knew that I had never properly appreciated my brother. You *are* in love with her, Miles; and you are a better man than I thought you. Does that express my opinion?"

Mirabel took her wasted hand, and kissed it gratefully.

"What a position I am in!" he said. "To love her as I love her; and if she knew the truth, to be the object of her horror—to be the man whom she would hunt to the scaffold, as an act of duty to the memory of her father!"

"You have left out the worst part of it," Mrs. Delvin reminded him. "You have bound yourself to help her to find the man. Your one hope of persuading her to become your wife rests on your success in finding him. And you are the man. There is your situation! You can't submit to it. How can you escape from it?"

"You are trying to frighten me, Agatha."

"I am trying to encourage you to face your position boldly."

"I am doing my best," Mirabel said, with sullen resignation. "Fortune has favored me so far. I have, really and truly, been unable to satisfy Emily by discovering Miss Jethro. She has left the place at which I saw her last—there is no trace to be found of her—and Emily knows it."

"And, now you are in the neighborhood, Emily expects you to discover Mrs. Rook. Suppose the woman has not got the employment which she heard of in Scotland? She may have returned to her late master's house since I wrote to you. You may meet her face to face, and she may recognize you."

"Not likely, Agatha."

"Why not?"

"Am I the man, with the short hair and the little half-whiskers, whom she remembers at the inn?"

"Who was it said, Miles, that the thing we never expect is the thing which generally happens? Be prepared for the thing you don't expect."

Mirabel shuddered. "I am surrounded by dangers whichever way I look," he said. "Do what I may, it turns out to be wrong. I was wrong, perhaps, when I brought Emily here."

"No."

"I could easily make an excuse," Mirabel persisted, "and take her back to London."

"And, for all you know to the contrary," his wiser sister replied, "Mrs. Rook may go to London, and you may take Emily back in time to receive her at the cottage. In every way you are safer in my old tower. And—don't forget—you have got my money to help you, if you want it. In my belief, Miles, you *will* want it."

"You are the dearest and best of sisters! What do you recommend me to do?"

"What you would have been obliged to do," Mrs. Delvin answered, "if you had remained in London. You must go to Redwood Hall to-morrow, as Emily has arranged it. If Mrs. Rook is not there, you must ask for her address in Scotland. If nobody knows the address, you must still bestir yourself in trying to find it. And when you do fall in with Mrs. Rook—"

"Well?"

"Take care, wherever it may be, that you see her privately."

Mirabel was alarmed. "Don't keep me in suspense," he burst out. "Tell me what you propose."

"Never mind what I propose to-night. Before I can tell you what I have in my mind I must know whether Mrs. Rook is in England or Scotland. Bring me that information to-morrow, and I shall have something to say to you. Hark! The wind is rising; the rain is falling. There is a chance of sleep for me—I shall soon hear the sea. Good-night."

"Good-night, dearest, and thank you again and again."

"One word more, Miles. Be on your guard with that old servant of Emily's. Mrs. Ellmother is no friend of yours; I saw her look at you."

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ACCIDENT AT BELFORD.

EARLY in the morning Mirabel set forth for Redwood Hall in one of the vehicles which Mrs. Delvin still kept at The Clink for the convenience of visitors. He returned soon after noon, having obtained information of the whereabouts of Mrs. Rook and her husband. When they had last been heard of they were at Lasswade, near Edinburgh. Whether they had or had not obtained the situation of which they were in search neither Miss Redwood nor any one else at the Hall could tell.

In half an hour more another horse was harnessed, and Mirabel was on his way to the railway station at Belford, to follow Mrs. Rook, at Emily's urgent request. Before his departure he had an interview with his sister.

Mrs. Delvin was rich enough to believe implicitly in the power of money. Her method of extricating her brother from the serious difficulties that beset him was to make it worth the while of Mr. and Mrs. Rook to leave England. Their passage to America would be secretly paid, and they would take with them a letter of credit addressed to a banker in New York. If Mirabel failed to discover them after they had sailed, Emily could not blame his want of devotion to her interests. He understood this, but he remained desponding and irresolute even with the money in his hands. The one person who could rouse his courage and animate his hope was also the one person who must know nothing of what had passed between his sister and himself. He had no choice but to leave Emily without being cheered by her bright looks, invigorated by her inspiring words. Mirabel went away on his doubtful errand with a heavy heart.

"The Clink" was so far from the nearest post town that the few letters usually addressed to the tower were delivered by private arrangement with a messenger. The man's punctuality depended on the convenience of his superiors employed at the office. Sometimes he arrived early, and sometimes he arrived late. On this particular morning he presented himself at half past one o'clock, with a letter for Emily; and when Mrs. Ellmother smartly reproved him for the delay, he coolly attributed it to the hospitality of friends whom he had met on the road.

The letter, directed to Emily at the cottage, had been forwarded from London by the person left in charge. It addressed her as, "Honored Miss." She turned at once to the end, and discovered the signature of Mrs. Rook!

"And Mr. Mirabel has gone," Emily exclaimed, "just when his presence is of the greatest importance to us!"

Shrewd Mrs. Ellmother suggested that it might be as well to read the letter first, and then to form an opinion.

Emily read it:

"*LISSWADE, NEAR EDINBURGH, September 26th.*

"HONORED MISS,—I take up my pen to bespeak your kind sympathy for

my husband and myself; two old people thrown on the world again by the death of our excellent master. We are under a month's notice to leave Redwood Hall.

"Hearing of a situation at this place (also that our expenses would be paid if we applied personally), we got leave of absence, and made our application. The lady and her son are either the stingiest people that ever lived, or they have taken a dislike to me and my husband, and they make money a means of getting rid of us easily. Suffice it to say that we have refused to accept starvation wages, and that we are still out of place. It is just possible that you may have heard of something to suit us. So I write at once, knowing that good chances are often lost through needless delay.

"We stop at Belford on our way back to see some friends of my husband, and we hope to get to Redwood Hall in good time on the 28th. Would you please address me to care of Miss Redwood, in case you know of any good situation for which we could apply? Perhaps we may be driven to try our luck in London. In this case will you permit me to have the honor of presenting my respects, as I ventured to propose when I wrote to you a little time since?

"I beg to remain, Honored Miss,

"Your humble servant, R. Rook."

Emily handed the letter to Mrs. Ellmother. "Read it," she said, "and tell me what you think."

"I think you had better be careful."

"Careful of Mrs. Rook?"

"Yes—and careful of Mrs. Delvin too."

Emily was astonished. "Are you really speaking seriously?" she said. "Mrs. Delvin is a most interesting person; so patient under her sufferings; so kind, so clever; so interested in all that interests *me*. I shall take the letter to her at once, and ask her advice."

"Have your own way, miss. I don't like her; I don't like her."

Mrs. Delvin's devotion to the interests of her guest took even Emily by surprise. After reading Mrs. Rook's letter she rang the bell on her table in a frenzy of impatience. "My brother must be instantly recalled," she said. "Telegraph to him in your own name, telling him what has happened. He will find the message waiting for him at the end of his journey."

The groom, summoned by the bell, was ordered to saddle the third and last horse left in the stables; to take the telegram to Belford; and to wait there until the answer arrived.

"How far is it to Redwood Hall?" Emily asked, when the man had received his orders.

"Ten miles," Mrs. Delvin answered.

"How can I get there to-day?"

"My dear, you can't get there."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Delvin, I must get there."

"Pardon *me*. My brother represents you in this matter. Leave it to my brother."

The tone taken by Mirabel's sister was positive, to say the least of it. Emily thought of what her faithful old servant had said, and began to

doubt her own discretion in so readily showing the letter. The mistake—if a mistake it was—had, however, been committed; and, wrong or right, she was not disposed to occupy the subordinate position which Mrs. Delvin had assigned to her.

"If you will look at Mrs. Rook's letter again," Emily replied, "you will see that I ought to answer it. She supposes I am in London."

"Do you propose to tell Mrs. Rook that you are in this house?" Mrs. Delvin asked.

"Certainly."

"You had better consult my brother before you take any responsibility on yourself."

Emily kept her temper. "Allow me to remind you," she said, "that Mr. Mirabel is not acquainted with Mrs. Rook, and that I am. If I speak to her personally, I can do much to assist the object of our inquiries before he returns. She is not an easy woman to deal with—"

"And therefore," Mrs. Delvin interposed, "the sort of person who requires careful handling by a man like my brother—a man of the world."

"The sort of person, as I venture to think," Emily persisted, "whom I ought to see with as little loss of time as possible."

Mrs. Delvin waited awhile before she replied. In her condition of health, anxiety was not easy to bear. Mrs. Rook's letter and Emily's obstinacy had seriously irritated her. But, like all persons of ability, she was capable, when there was serious occasion for it, of exerting self-control. She really liked and admired Emily; and, as the elder woman and the hostess, she set an example of forbearance and good-humor.

"It is out of my power to send you to Redwood Hall at once," she resumed. "The only one of my three horses now at your disposal is the horse which took my brother to the Hall this morning. A distance, there and back, of twenty miles. You are not in too great a hurry, I am sure, to allow the horse time to rest?"

Emily made her excuses with perfect grace and sincerity. "I had no idea the distance was so great," she confessed. "I will wait, dear Mrs. Delvin, as long as you like."

They parted as good friends as ever—with a certain reserve, nevertheless, on either side. Emily's eager nature was depressed and irritated by the prospect of delay. Mrs. Delvin, on the other hand (devoted to her brother's interests), thought hopefully of obstacles which might present themselves with the lapse of time. The horse might prove to be incapable of further exertion for that day. Or the threatening aspect of the weather might end in a storm.

But the hours passed, and the sky cleared, and the horse was reported to be fit for work again. Fortune was against the lady of the tower: she had no choice but to submit.

Mrs. Delvin had just sent word to Emily that the carriage would be ready for her in ten minutes, when the coachman who had driven Mirabel to Belford returned. He brought news which agreeably surprised both the ladies. Mirabel had reached the station five minutes too late; the coachman had left him waiting the arrival of the next train to the north. He would now receive the telegraphic message at Belford, and might return immediately by taking the groom's horse. Mrs. Delvin left it to Emily to decide

whether she would proceed by herself to Redwood Hall or wait for Mirabel's return.

Under the changed circumstances, Emily would have acted ungraciously if she had persisted in holding to her first intention. She consented to wait.

The sea still remained calm. In the stillness of the moorland solitude on the western side of "The Clink," the rapid steps of a horse were heard at some little distance on the high-road. Emily ran out, followed by careful Mrs. Ellmother, expecting to meet Mirabel.

She was disappointed: it was the groom who had returned. As he pulled up at the house and dismounted, Emily noticed that the man looked excited.

"Is there anything wrong?" she asked.

"There has been an accident, miss."

"Not to Mr. Mirabel!"

"No, no, miss. An accident to a poor foolish woman, travelling from Lasswade."

Emily looked at Mrs. Ellmother. "It can't be Mrs. Rook!" she said.

"That's the name, miss! She got out before the train had quite stopped, and fell on the platform."

"Was she hurt?"

"Seriously hurt, as I heard. They carried her into a house hard by, and sent for the doctor."

"Was Mr. Mirabel one of the people who helped her?"

"He was on the other side of the platform, miss, waiting for the train from London. I got to the station and gave him the telegram just as the accident took place. We crossed over to hear more about it. Mr. Mirabel was telling me that he would return to 'The Clink' on my horse, when he heard the woman's name mentioned. Upon that, he changed his mind and went to the house."

"Was he let in?"

"The doctor wouldn't hear of it. He was making his examination, and he said nobody was to be in the room but her husband, and the woman of the house."

"Is Mr. Mirabel waiting to see her?"

"Yes, miss. He said he would wait all day, if necessary; and he gave me this bit of a note to take to the mistress."

Emily turned to Mrs. Ellmother. "It's impossible to stay here, not knowing whether Mrs. Rook is going to live or die," she said. "I shall go to Belford, and you will go with me."

The groom interfered. "I beg your pardon, miss. It was Mr. Mirabel's most particular wish that you were not, on any account, to go to Belford."

"Why not?"

"He didn't say."

Emily eyed the note in the man's hand with well-grounded distrust. In all probability, Mirabel's object in writing was to instruct his sister to prevent her guest from going to Belford. The carriage was waiting at the door. With her usual promptness of resolution, Emily decided on taking it for granted that she was free to use as she pleased a carriage which had been already placed at her disposal.

"Tell your mistress," she said to the groom, "that I am going to Belford instead of to Redwood Hall."

In a minute more she and Mrs. Ellmother were on their way to join Mirabel at the station.

CHAPTER LIX.

OUTSIDE THE ROOM.

EMILY found Mirabel in the waiting-room at Belford. Her sudden appearance might well have amazed him; but his face expressed a more serious emotion than surprise—he looked at her as if she had alarmed him.

"Didn't you get my message?" he asked. "I told the groom I wished you to wait for my return. I sent a note to my sister, in case he made any mistake."

"The man made no mistake," Emily answered. "I was in too great a hurry to be able to speak with Mrs. Delvin. Did you really suppose I could endure the suspense of waiting till you came back? Do you think I can be of no use—I who know Mrs. Rook?"

"They won't let you see her."

"Why not? *You* seem to be waiting to see her."

"I am waiting for the return of the rector of Belford. He is at Berwick; and he has been sent for, at Mrs. Rook's urgent request."

"Is she dying?"

"She is in fear of death—whether rightly or wrongly I don't know. There is some internal injury from the fall. I hope to see her when the rector returns. As a brother clergyman, I may with perfect propriety ask him to use his influence in my favor."

"I am glad to find you so eager about it."

"I am always eager in your interests."

"Don't think me ungrateful," Emily replied, gently. "I am no stranger to Mrs. Rook; and if I send in my name I may be able to see her before the clergyman returns."

She stopped. Mirabel suddenly moved so as to place himself between her and the door. "I must really beg of you to give up that idea," he said. "You don't know what horrid sight you may see—what dreadful agonies of pain this unhappy woman may be suffering."

His manner suggested to Emily that he might be acting under some motive which he was unwilling to acknowledge. "If you have a reason for wishing that I should keep away from Mrs. Rook," she said, "let me hear what it is. Surely we trust each other? I have done my best to set the example, at any rate."

Mirabel seemed to be at a loss for a reply.

While he was hesitating, the station-master passed the door. Emily asked him to direct her to the house in which Mrs. Rook had been received. He led the way to the end of the platform, and pointed to the house. Emily and Mrs. Ellmother immediately left the station. Mirabel accompanied them, still remonstrating, still raising obstacles.

The house door was opened by an old man. He looked reproachfully at Mirabel. "You have been told already," he said, "that no strangers are to see my wife."

Encouraged by discovering that the man was Mr. Rook, Emily mentioned her name. "Perhaps you may have heard Mrs. Rook speak of me," she added.

"I've heard her speak of you oftentimes."

"What does the doctor say?"

"He thinks she may get over it. She doesn't believe him."

"Will you say that I am anxious to see her, if she feels well enough to receive me?"

Mr. Rook looked at Mrs. Ellmother. "Are there two of you wanting to go upstairs?" he inquired.

"This is my old friend and servant," Emily answered. "She will wait for me down here."

"She can wait in the parlor; the good people of this house are well known to me." He pointed to the parlor door, and then led the way to the first floor. Emily followed him. Mirabel, as obstinate as ever, followed Emily.

Mr. Rook opened a door at the end of the landing; and turning round to speak to Emily, noticed Mirabel standing behind her. Without making any remark, the old man pointed significantly down the stairs. His resolution was evidently immovable. Mirabel appealed to Emily to help him.

"She will see me if *you* ask her," he said. "Let me wait here."

The sound of his voice was instantly followed by a cry from the bed-chamber—a cry of terror.

Mr. Rook hurried into the room and closed the door. In less than a minute he opened it again, with doubt and horror plainly visible in his face. He stepped up to Mirabel, eyed him with the closest scrutiny, and drew back again with a look of relief.

"She's wrong," he said; "you are not the man."

This strange proceeding startled Emily. "What man do you mean?" she asked.

Mr. Rook took no notice of the question. With his eyes still fixed on Mirabel, he pointed down the stairs once more. In silence Mirabel had heard him; in silence Mirabel obeyed him. Mr. Rook turned to Emily.

"Are you easily frightened?" he said.

"I don't understand you," Emily replied. "Who is going to frighten me? Why did you speak to Mr. Mirabel in that strange way?"

Mr. Rook looked toward the bedroom door. "Maybe you'll hear why, inside there. If I could have my way, you shouldn't see her; but she's not to be reasoned with. A caution, miss. Don't be too ready to believe what my wife may say to you. She's had a fright." He opened the door.

"In my belief," he whispered, "she's off her head."

Emily crossed the threshold. Mr. Rook softly closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER LX.

INSIDE THE ROOM.

A DECENT elderly woman was seated at the bedside. She rose and spoke to Emily with a mingling of sorrow and confusion strikingly expressed in her face. "It isn't my fault," she said, "that Mrs. Rook receives you in this manner; I am obliged to humor her."

She drew aside, and showed Mrs. Rook with her head supported by many pillows, and her face strangely hidden from view under a veil. Emily started back in horror. "Is her face injured?" she asked.

Mrs. Rook answered the question herself. Her voice was low and weak; but she still spoke with the same nervous hurry of articulation which had been remarked by Alban Morris on the day when she asked him to direct her to Netherwoods.

"Not exactly injured," she explained; "but one's appearance is a matter of some anxiety even on one's death-bed. I am disfigured by a thoughtless use of water, to bring me to when I had my fall—and I can't get at my toilet things to put myself right again. I don't wish to shock you. Please excuse the veil."

Emily remembered the rouge on her cheeks and the dye on her hair when they had first seen each other at the school. Vanity, of all human frailties the longest-lived, still held its place in this woman's nature; superior to torment of conscience, unassailable by terror of death!

The good woman of the house waited a moment before she left the room. "What shall I say," she asked, "if the clergyman comes?"

Mrs. Rook lifted her hand solemnly. "Say," she answered, "that a dying sinner is making atonement for sin. Say this young lady is present by the decree of an all-wise Providence. No mortal creature must disturb us." Her hand dropped back heavily on the bed. "Are we alone?" she asked.

"We are alone," Emily answered. "What made you scream just before I came in?"

"No, I can't allow you to remind me of that," Mrs. Rook protested. "I must compose myself. Be quiet. Let me think."

Recovering her composure, she also recovered that sense of enjoyment in talking of herself which was one of the marked peculiarities in her character.

"You will excuse me if I exhibit religion," she resumed. "My dear parents were exemplary people; I was most carefully brought up. Are you pious? Let us hope so."

Emily was once more reminded of the past.

The by-gone time returned to her memory—the time when she had accepted Sir Jarvis Redwood's offer of employment, and when Mrs. Rook had arrived at the school to be her travelling companion to the north. The wretched creature had entirely forgotten her own loose talk, after she had

drunk Miss Ladd's good wine to the last drop in the bottle. As she was boasting now of her piety, so she had boasted then of her lost faith and hope, and had mockingly declared her freethinking opinions to be the result of her ill-assorted marriage. Forgotten—all forgotten in this later time of pain and fear. Prostrate under the dread of death, her innermost nature—stripped of the concealments of her later life—was revealed to view. The early religious training, at which she had scoffed in the insolence of health and strength, revealed its latent influence—intermitted, but a living influence always from first to last. Mrs. Rook was tenderly mindful of her exemplary parents, and proud of exhibiting religion on the bed from which she was never to rise again.

"Did I tell you that I am a miserable sinner?" she asked, after an interval of silence.

Emily could endure it no longer. "Say that to the clergyman," she answered—"not to me."

"Oh, but I must say it!" Mrs. Rook insisted. "I *am* a miserable sinner. Let me give you an instance of it," she continued, with a shameless relish of the memory of her own frailties. "I have been a drinker in my time. Anything was welcome, when the fit was on me, as long as it got into my head. Like other persons in liquor, I sometimes talked of things that had better have been kept secret. We bore that in mind—my old man and I—when we were engaged by Sir Jervis. Miss Redwood wanted to put us in the next bedroom to hers—a risk not to be run. I might have talked of the murder at the inn, and she might have heard me. Please to remark a curious thing. Whatever else I might let out when I was in my cups, not a word about the pocket-book ever dropped from me. You will ask how I know it. My dear, I should have heard of it from my husband if I had let *that* out—and he is as much in the dark as you are. Wonderful are the workings of the human mind, as the poet says; and drink drowns care, as the proverb says. But can drink deliver a person from fear by day and fear by night? I believe, if I had dropped a word about the pocket-book, it would have sobered me in an instant. Have you any remark to make on this curious circumstance?"

Thus far Emily had allowed the woman to ramble on, in the hope of getting information which direct inquiry might fail to produce. It was impossible, however, to pass over the allusion to the pocket-book. After giving her time to recover from the exhaustion which her heavy breathing sufficiently revealed, Emily put the question, "Whom did the pocket-book belong to?"

"Wait a little," said Mrs. Rook. "Everything in its right place, is my motto. I mustn't begin with the pocket-book. Why did I begin with it? Do you think this veil on my face confuses me? Suppose I take it off? But you must promise first—solemnly promise you won't look at my face. How can I tell you about the murder (the murder is part of my confession, you know) with this lace tickling my skin? Go away, and stand there with your back to me. Thank you. Now I'll take it off. Ha! the air feels refreshing; I know what I am about. Good heavens! I have forgotten something. I have forgotten *him*. And after such a fright as he gave me! Did you see him on the landing?"

"Whom are you talking of?" Emily asked.

Mrs. Rook's failing voice sank lower still.

"Come closer," she said; "this must be whispered. Whom am I talking of?" she repeated. "I am talking of the man who slept in the other bed at the inn; the man who did the deed with his own razor. He was gone when I looked into the out-house in the gray of the morning. Oh, I have done my duty! I have told Mr. Rook to keep an eye on him downstairs. You haven't an idea how obstinate and stupid my husband is. He says I couldn't know the man, because I didn't see him. Ha! there's such a thing as hearing, when you don't see. I heard, and I knew it again."

Emily turned cold from head to foot.

"What did you know again?" she said.

"His voice," Mrs. Rook answered. "I'll swear to his voice before all the judges in England."

Emily rushed to the bed. She looked at the woman who had said those dreadful words, speechless with horror.

"You're breaking your promise!" cried Mrs. Rook. "You false girl, you're breaking your promise!"

She snatched at the veil, and put it on again. The sight of her face, momentary as it had been, re-assured Emily. Her wild eyes, made wilder still by the blurred stains of rouge below them, half washed away, her dishevelled hair, with streaks of gray showing through the dye, presented a spectacle which would have been grotesque under other circumstances, but which now reminded Emily of Mr. Rook's last words, warning her not to believe what his wife said, and even declaring his conviction that her intellect was deranged. Emily drew back from the bed, conscious of an overpowering sense of self-reproach. Although it was only for a moment, she had allowed her faith in Mirabel to be shaken by a woman who was out of her mind.

"Try to forgive me," she said. "I didn't willfully break my promise. You frightened me."

Mrs. Rook began to cry. "I was a handsome woman in my time," she murmured. "You would say I am handsome still, if the clumsy fools about me had not spoiled my appearance. Oh, I do feel so weak! Where's my medicine?"

The bottle was on the table. Emily gave her the prescribed dose, and revived her failing strength.

"I am an extraordinary woman," she resumed. "My resolution has always been the admiration of every one who knew me. But my mind feels—how shall I express it?—a little vacant. Have mercy on my poor wicked soul! Help me."

"How can I help you?"

"I want to recollect. Something happened in the summer-time, when we were talking at Netherwoods. I mean when that impudent master at the school showed his suspicions of me. (Lord! how he frightened me when he turned up afterward at Sir Jervis's house!) You must have seen yourself he suspected me. How did he show it?"

"He showed you my locket," Emily answered.

"Oh, the horrid reminder of the murder!" Mrs. Rook exclaimed. "I didn't mention it; don't blame me. You poor innocent, I have something dreadful to tell you."

Emily's horror of the woman forced her to speak. "Don't tell me!" she cried. "I know more than you suppose; I know what I was ignorant of when you saw the locket."

Mrs. Rook took offense at the interruption.

"Clever as you are, there's one thing you don't know," she said. "You asked me, just now, whom the pocket-book belonged to. It belonged to your father. What's the matter? Are you crying?"

Emily was thinking of her father. The pocket-book was the last present she had given to him—a present on his birthday. "Is it lost?" she asked, sadly.

"No, it's not lost. You will hear more of it directly. Dry your eyes, and expect something interesting—I'm going to talk about love. Love, my dear, means myself. Why shouldn't it? I'm not the only nice-looking woman, married to an old man, who has had a lover."

"Wretch! what has that got to do with it?"

"Everything, you rude girl! My lover was like the rest of them; he would bet on race-horses, and he lost. He owned it to me, on the day when your father came to our inn. He said, 'I must find the money—or be off to America, and say good-by forever.' I was fool enough to be fond of him. It broke my heart to hear him talk in that way. I said, 'If I find the money, and more than the money, will you take me with you wherever you go?'. Of course he said Yes. I suppose you have heard of the inquest held at our old place by the coroner and jury? Oh, what idiots! They believed I was asleep on the night of the murder. I never closed my eyes—I was so miserable, I was so tempted."

"Tempted? What tempted you?"

"Do you think I had any money to spare? Your father's pocket-book tempted me. I had seen him open it, to pay his bill overnight. It was full of bank-notes. Oh, what an overpowering thing love is! Perhaps you have known it yourself."

Emily's indignation once more got the better of her prudence. "Have you no feeling of decency on your death-bed?" she said.

Mrs. Rook forgot her piety; she was ready with an impudent rejoinder. "You hot-headed little woman, your time will come," she answered. "But you're right—I am wandering from the point; I am not sufficiently sensible of this solemn occasion. By-the-bye, do you notice my language? I inherit correct English from my mother—a cultivated person, who married beneath her. My maternal grandfather was a gentleman. Did I tell you that there came a time, on that dreadful night, when I could stay in bed no longer? The pocket-book—I did nothing but think of that devilish pocket-book, full of bank-notes. My husband was fast asleep all the time. I got a chair and stood on it. I looked into the place where the two men were sleeping, through the glass in the top of the door. Your father was awake; he was walking up and down the room. What do you say? Was he agitated? I didn't notice. I don't know whether the other man was asleep or awake. I saw nothing but the pocket-book stuck under the pillow, half in and half out. Your father kept on walking up and down. I thought to myself, 'I'll wait till he gets tired, and then I'll have another look at the pocket-book.' Where's the wine? The doctor said I might have a glass of wine when I wanted it."

Emily found the wine and gave it to her. She shuddered as she accidentally touched Mrs. Rook's hand.

The wine helped the sinking woman.

"I must have got up more than once," she resumed. "And more than once my heart must have failed me. I don't clearly remember what I did, till the gray of the morning came. I think that must have been the last time I looked through the glass in the door."

She began to tremble. She tore the veil off her face. She cried out, piteously, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner! Come here," she said to Emily. "Where are you? No! I daren't tell you what I saw; I daren't tell you what I did. When you're possessed by the devil, there's nothing, nothing, you can't do! Where did I find the courage to unlock the door? Where did I find the courage to go in? Any other woman would have lost her senses when she found blood on her fingers after taking the pocket-book—"

Emily's head swam; her heart beat furiously. She staggered to the door, and opened it to escape from the room.

"I'm guilty of robbing him; but I'm innocent of his blood!" Mrs. Rook called after her wildly. "The deed was done—the yard door was wide open, and the man was gone—when I looked in for the last time. Come back! come back!"

Emily looked round.

"I can't go near you," she said, faintly.

"Come near enough to see this."

She opened her bed-gown at the throat, and drew up a loop of ribbon over her head. The pocket-book was attached to the ribbon. She held it out.

"Your father's book," she said. "Won't you take your father's book?"

For a moment, and only for a moment, Emily was repelled by the profanation associated with her birthday gift. Then the loving remembrance of the dear hands that had so often touched that relic drew the faithful daughter back to the woman whom she abhorred. Her eyes rested tenderly on the book. Before it had lain in that guilty bosom it had been *his* book. The beloved memory was all that was left to her now; the beloved memory consecrated it to her hand. She took the book.

"Open it," said Mrs. Rook.

There were two five-pound bank-notes in it.

"His?" Emily asked.

"No; mine—the little I have been able to save toward restoring what I stole."

"Oh!" Emily cried, "is there some good in this woman, after all?"

"There's no good in the woman," Mrs. Rook answered, desperately. "There's nothing but fear—fear of hell now; fear of the pocket-book in the past time. Twice I tried to destroy it, and twice it came back to remind me of the duty that I owed to my miserable soul. I tried to throw it into the fire. It struck the bar, and fell back into the fender at my feet. I went out and cast it into the well. It came back again in the first bucket of water that was drawn up. From that moment I began to save what I could. Restitution! Atonement! I tell you the book found a tongue, and those were the grand words it dinned in my ears morning and

night." She stopped to fetch her breath—stopped, and struck her bosom. "I hid it here, so that no person should see it, and no person take it from me. Superstition? oh yes, superstition! Shall I tell you something? You may find yourself superstitious if you are ever cut to the heart as I was. He left me! The man I had disgraced myself for deserted me on the day when I gave him the stolen money. He suspected it was stolen; he took care of his own cowardly self, and left me to the hard mercy of the law if the theft was found out. What do you call that in the way of punishment? Haven't I suffered? Haven't I made atonement? Be a Christian—say you forgive me."

"I do forgive you."

"Say you will pray for me."

"I will."

"Ha! that comforts me. Now you can go."

Emily looked at her imploringly. "Don't send me away, knowing no more of the murder than I knew when I came here. Is there nothing, really nothing, you can tell me?"

Mrs. Rook pointed to the door.

"Haven't I told you already? Go down-stairs, and see the wretch who escaped in the dawn of the morning!"

"Gently, ma'am—gently! You're talking too loud," cried a mocking voice from outside.

"It's only the doctor," said Mrs. Rook. She crossed her hands over her bosom, with a deep-drawn sigh. "I want no doctor now. My peace is made with my Maker. I'm ready for death; I'm fit for heaven. Go away! go away!"

CHAPTER LXI.

DOWN-STAIRS.

In a moment more the doctor came in: a brisk, smiling, self-sufficient man, smartly dressed, with a flower in his button-hole. A stifling odor of musk filled the room as he drew out his handkerchief with a flourish and wiped his forehead.

"Plenty of hard work in my line, just now," he said. "Hullo, Mrs. Rook! somebody has been allowing you to excite yourself. I heard you before I opened the door. Have you been encouraging her to talk?" he asked, turning to Emily, and shaking his finger at her with an air of facetious remonstrance.

Incapable of answering him, forgetful of the ordinary restraints of social intercourse, with the one doubt that preserved her belief in Mirabel eager for confirmation, Emily signed to this stranger to follow her into a corner of the room, out of hearing. She made no excuses; she took no notice of his look of surprise. One hope was all she could feel, one word was all she could say, after that second assertion of Mirabel's guilt. Indicating Mrs. Rook by a glance at the bed, she whispered the word:

"Mad?"

Flippant and familiar, the doctor imitated her; he too looked at the bed.

"No more mad than you are, miss. As I said just now, my patient has been exciting herself; I dare say she has talked a little wildly in conse-

quence. *Hers* isn't a brain to give way, I can tell you. But there's somebody else—"

Emily had fled from the room. He had destroyed her last fragment of belief in Mirabel's innocence. She was on the landing, trying to steady her mind, when the doctor joined her.

"Are you acquainted with the gentleman down-stairs?" he asked.

"What gentleman?"

"I haven't heard his name; he looks like a clergyman. If you know him—"

"I do know him. I can't answer questions. My mind—"

"Steady your mind, miss, and take your friend home as soon as you can. *He* hasn't got Mrs. Rook's hard brain; he's in a state of nervous prostration, which may end badly. Do you know where he lives?"

"He is staying with his sister, Mrs. Delvin."

"Mrs. Delvin! she's a friend and patient of mine. Say I'll look in to-morrow morning, and see what I can do for her brother. In the mean time get him to bed and to rest, and don't be afraid of giving him brandy."

The doctor returned to the bedroom. Emily heard Mrs. Ellmother's voice below.

"Are you up there, miss?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Ellmother ascended the stairs. "It was in an evil hour," she said, "that you insisted on going to this place. Mr. Mirabel—" The sight of Emily's face suspended the next words on her lips. She took the poor young mistress in her arms. "Oh, my child! what has happened to you?"

"Don't ask me now. I can hardly stand—help me to get down-stairs."

"You won't be startled when you see Mr. Mirabel, will you, my dear? I wouldn't let them disturb you; I said nobody should speak to you but myself. The truth is, Mr. Mirabel has had a dreadful fright. What are you looking for?"

"Can we get into the air?"

There was a court-yard at the back of the house. They found their way to it. A bench was placed against one of the walls. They sat down.

"I had better not tell you about it now," said Mrs. Ellmother. "It's easy to see, my dear, you have been sorely tried already. Must I go on? I won't be long about it. Mr. Mirabel came into the parlor where I was; and Mr. Rook came in too—and waited, looking at him. Mr. Mirabel sat down in a corner, in a dazed state, as I thought. It wasn't for long. He jumped up, and clapped his hand on his heart as if his heart hurt him. 'I must and will know what's going on upstairs,' he says. Mr. Rook pulled him back, and said, 'Wait till the young lady comes down.' Mr. Mirabel wouldn't hear of it. 'Your wife's frightening her,' he says; 'your wife's telling her horrible things about me.' He was taken on a sudden with a shivering fit; his eyes rolled and his teeth chattered. Mr. Rook made matters worse: he lost his temper. 'I'm damned,' he says, 'if I don't begin to think you *are* the man; I've half a mind to send for the police.' Mr. Mirabel dropped into his chair. His eyes stared; his mouth fell open. I took hold of his hand. Cold—cold as ice. What it all

I can't say. Oh, miss, you know! Let me tell you the rest of it
time."

Emily insisted on hearing more. "The end!" she cried. "How did it end?"

"I don't know how it might have ended if the doctor hadn't come in—to pay his visit, you know, upstairs. He said some learned words. When he came to plain English he asked if anybody had frightened the gentleman. I said Mr. Rook had frightened him. The doctor says to Mr. Rook: 'You had better mind what you are about. If you frighten him again, you may have his death to answer for.' That cowed Mr. Rook; he asked what he had better do. 'Give me some brandy for him first,' says the doctor, 'and then get him home at once.' Mr. Rook went to the inn to order the carriage. Your eyes are quicker than mine, miss—I think I hear it now."

They rose and went to the house door. The carriage was there.

Still cowed by what the doctor had said, Mr. Rook appeared, carefully leading Mirabel out. He had revived, under the action of the stimulant. Passing Emily, he raised his eyes to her, trembled, and looked down again. They had driven to Belford in a close carriage. When Mr. Rook opened the door, Mirabel showed a momentary return of courage. He turned to Emily and spoke.

"I am as innocent as you are," he said to her.

She started back from him, and caught at Mrs. Ellmother's arm. "You go with him in the carriage," she said. "I can't."

"How are you to get back, miss?"

She turned away, and spoke to the coachman: "I am not very well. I want the fresh air—I'll sit by you."

Mrs. Ellmother remonstrated and protested: in vain. As Emily had determined it should be, so it was.

"Has he said anything?" she asked, when they arrived at their journey's end.

"He has been like a man frozen up; he hasn't said a word; he hasn't even moved."

"Take him to his sister and tell her all that you know. I can't face Mrs. Delvin. Be patient, my good old friend; I have no secrets from you. Only wait till to-morrow, and leave me by myself to-night."

Alone in her room, Emily opened her writing-case. Searching among the letters in it, she drew out a printed paper. It was the handbill describing the man who had escaped from the inn, and offering a reward for the discovery of him.

At the first line of the personal description of the fugitive, the paper dropped from her hand. Burning tears forced their way into her eyes. Feeling for her handkerchief, she touched the pocket-book which she had received from Mrs. Rook.

After a little hesitation she took it out and opened it.

The sight of the bank-notes repelled her; she hid them in one of the pockets of the book. There was a second pocket which she had not yet examined. She put her hand into it, and, touching something, drew out a letter.

The envelope (already opened) was addressed to "James Brown, Esq., Post-office, Zealand." Would it be inconsistent with her respect for her father's memory to examine the letter? No; a glance would decide whether she ought to read it or not.

It was without date or address; a startling letter to look at—for it *only* contained three words:

"I say No."

The words were signed in initials: "S. J."

In the instant when she read the initials, the name occurred to her.

Sara Jethro!

CHAPTER LXII.

THE DEFENSE OF MIRABEL.

THE discovery of the letter gave a new direction to Emily's thoughts, and so relieved her mind, for the time at least, from the burden that weighed on it. To what question on her father's part had "I say No" been Miss Jethro's brief and stern reply? Neither letter nor envelope offered the slightest hint that might assist inquiry; even the postmark had been so carelessly impressed that it was illegible. Emily was still pondering over the three mysterious words, when Mrs. Ellmother interrupted her.

"Have you misunderstood me?" she asked.

"In what way, if you please?"

"I said I wished to be left alone till to-morrow."

"There's another person who has wishes to be consulted, Miss, besides yourself. Mrs. Delvin says she must positively see you to-night. It's my belief that she will send for the servants, and have herself carried in here, if you refuse to do what she asks. You needn't be afraid of seeing Mr. Mirabel."

"Where is he?"

"His sister has given up her bedroom to him," Mrs. Ellmother answered. "She thought of your feelings before she sent me here, and had the curtains closed between the sitting-room and the bedroom. I suspect my nasty temper misled me when I took a dislike to Mrs. Delvin. She is a good creature, and she has a good reason, in my opinion, for wishing to see you."

"Did she seem to be angry when she sent you here?"

"Angry! She was crying when I left her."

Emily hesitated no longer.

She noticed a remarkable change in the invalid's sitting-room—so brilliantly lighted on other occasions—the moment she entered it. The lamps were shaded and the candles were all extinguished. "My eyes don't bear the light so well as usual," Mrs. Delvin said. "Come and sit near me, Emily; I hope to quiet your mind. I should be grieved if you left my house with a wrong impression of me."

Knowing what she knew, suffering as she must have suffered, the quiet kindness of her tone implied an exercise of self-restraint which appealed irresistibly to Emily's sympathies. "Forgive me," she said, "for having done you an injustice. I am ashamed to think that I shrank from seeing you when I returned from Belford."

"I will endeavor to be worthy of your better opinion of me," Mrs. Delvin replied. "In one respect, at least, I may claim to have had your

^{interests at heart}—while we were still personally strangers. I tried

my poor brother to own the truth, when he discovered the

terrible position in which he was placed toward you. He was too conscious of the absence of any proof which might induce you to believe him if he attempted to defend himself—in one word, he was too timid to take my advice. He has paid the penalty, and I have paid the penalty, of deceiving you."

Emily started. "In what way have you deceived me?" she asked.

"In the way that was forced on us by our own conduct," Mrs. Delvin said. "We have appeared to help you without really doing so. We calculated on inducing you to marry my brother, and then (when he could speak with the authority of a husband) on prevailing with you to give up all further inquiries as absolutely hopeless. When you insisted on seeing Mrs. Rook, he had the money in his hand to bribe her and her husband to leave England."

"Oh, Mrs. Delvin!"

"I don't attempt to excuse myself. I don't expect you to consider how sorely I was tempted to secure the happiness of my brother's life by marriage with such a woman as yourself. I don't remind you that I knew, when I put obstacles in your way, that you were blindly devoting yourself to the discovery of an innocent man."

Emily heard her with angry surprise. "Innocent?" she repeated. "Mrs. Rook recognized his voice the instant she heard him speak."

Impenetrable to interruption, Mrs. Delvin went on.

"But what I do ask," she persisted, "even after our short acquaintance, is this: do you suspect me of deliberately scheming to make you the wife of a murderer?"

Emily had never viewed the serious question between them in this light. Warmly, generously, she answered the appeal that had been made to her. "Oh, don't think that of me! I know I spoke thoughtlessly and cruelly to you just now—"

"You spoke impulsively," Mrs. Delvin interposed; "that was all. Now that I am encouraged to go on, I may tell you the rest. Let me say first that I have no interested object in view. I understand but too well that there can be no hope, now, of a marriage-engagement between you and my brother. When you leave me—how can I expect you to remain here after what has happened?—I wish you to leave me, knowing all that I know, and not deceived by appearances, as the coroner and jury were deceived. You are aware, I suppose, that your father and my brother were strangers when they met at the inn?"

"Yes; I know that."

"If there had been any conversation between them, when they retired to rest, they might have mentioned their names. But your father was preoccupied, and my brother, after a long day's walk, was so tired that he fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. He only woke when the morning dawned. What he saw, when he looked toward the opposite bed, might have struck with terror the boldest man that ever lived. His first impulse was naturally to alarm the house. As he got on his feet, he saw his own razor—a blood-stained razor—on the bed by the side of the corpse. At that discovery he lost all control over himself. In a panic of terror he snatched up his knapsack, unfastened the yard door, and fled from the house. Knowing him as we know him, can we wonder? Many

a man has been hanged for murder on circumstantial evidence less direct than the evidence against poor Miles. Do you think I am exaggerating?"

"Certainly not!"

"More than that I must not ask you to concede," Mrs. Delvin continued. "In the utter absence of proof of my brother's innocence, how can I complain of your having been convinced of his guilt? I dare not even contradict you, if you declare that I am myself deceived in believing him to be as innocent as I am of that horrible crime. All I can hope is, that I may have shown you some reason to doubt. Will you give him the benefit of the doubt?"

"Willingly!" Emily replied. "Am I right in supposing that you don't despair of proving his innocence even yet?"

"I don't quite despair; but my hopes have grown fainter and fainter as the years have gone on. There is a person associated with his escape from Zeeland—a person named Jethro—"

"You mean Miss Jethro?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"I know her—and my father knew her. I have found a letter addressed to him, which I have no doubt was written by Miss Jethro. It is barely possible that you may understand what it means. Pray look at it."

"I am quite unable to help you," Mrs. Delvin answered, after reading the letter. "All I know of Miss Jethro is, that but for her interposition my brother might have fallen into the hands of the police. She saved him."

"Knowing him, of course?"

"That is the remarkable part of it: they were perfect strangers to each other."

"But she must have had some motive?"

"There is the foundation of my hope for Miles! Miss Jethro declared, when I wrote and put the question to her, that the one motive by which she was actuated was the motive of mercy. I don't believe her. To my mind it is in the last degree improbable that she would consent to protect a stranger from discovery, who owed to her (as my brother did) that he was a fugitive suspected of murder. She knows something, I am firmly convinced, of that dreadful event at Zeeland, and she has some reason for keeping it secret. Have you any influence over her?"

"Tell me where I can find her!"

"I can't tell you. She has removed from the address at which my brother saw her last. He has made every possible inquiry—without result."

As she replied in those discouraging terms, the curtains which divided Mrs. Delvin's bedroom from her sitting-room were drawn aside. An elderly woman-servant approached her mistress's couch.

"Mr. Mirabel is awake, ma'am. He is very low; I can hardly feel his pulse. Shall I give him some more brandy?"

Mrs. Delvin held out her hand to Emily. "Come to me to-morrow morning," she said, and signed to the servant to wheel her couch into the next room. As the curtains closed over them, Emily heard Mirabel's

"Where am I?" he said, faintly. "Is it all a dream?"

His recovery, the next morning, was gloomy indeed. He

had sunk into a state of deplorable weakness, in mind as well as in body. The little memory of events that he still preserved was regarded by him as the memory of a dream. He alluded to Emily, and to his meeting with her unexpectedly. But from that point his recollection failed him. They had talked of something interesting, he said, but he was unable to remember what it was; and they had waited for somebody at a railway-station, but who the person was he could not tell. He sighed and wondered when Emily would marry him, and so fell asleep again, weaker than ever.

Not having any confidence in the doctor at Belford, Mrs. Delvin had sent an urgent message to a physician at Edinburgh, famous for his skill in treating diseases of the nervous system. "I can hardly expect him to reach this remote place before to-morrow," she said; "I must bear my suspense as well as I can."

"You shall not bear it alone," Emily answered. "I will wait with you until the doctor comes."

Mrs. Delvin lifted her frail, wasted hands to Emily's face, drew it a little nearer, and kissed her.

CHAPTER LXIII.

ON THE WAY TO LONDON.

THE parting words had been spoken. Emily and her companion were on their way to London.

For some little time they travelled in silence—alone in the railway-carriage. After submitting as long as she could to lay an embargo on the use of her tongue, Mrs. Ellmother started the conversation by means of a question: "Do you think Mr. Mirabel will get over it, Miss?"

"It's useless to ask me," Emily said. "Even the great man from Edinburgh is not able to decide yet whether he will recover or not."

"You have taken me into your confidence, Miss Emily, as you promised, and I have got something on my mind in consequence. May I mention it without giving offence?"

"What is it?"

"I wish you had never taken up with Mr. Mirabel."

Emily was silent. Mrs. Ellmother, having a design of her own to accomplish, ventured to speak more plainly. "I often think of Mr. Alban Morris," she proceeded. "I always did like him, and I always shall!"

Emily suddenly pulled down her veil. "Don't speak of him!" she said.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Miss."

"You don't offend me. You distress me. Oh, how often I have wished—" She threw herself back in a corner of the carriage, and said no more.

Although not remarkable for the possession of delicate tact, Mrs. Ellmother discovered that the best course she could now follow was a course of silence.

Even at the time when she had most implicitly trusted Mirabel, the fear that she might have acted hastily and harshly toward Alban had occasionally troubled Emily's mind. The impression produced by later events had not only intensified this feeling, but had presented the motives of that true friend under an entirely new point of view. If she had been left in

ignorance of the manner of her father's death—as Alban had designed to leave her; as she would have been left but for the treachery of Francine—how happily free she would have been from thoughts which it was now a terror to her to recall. She would have parted from Mirabel when the visit to the pleasant country-house had come to an end, remembering him as an amusing acquaintance, and nothing more. He would have been spared, and she would have been spared, the shock that had so cruelly assailed them both. What had she gained by Mrs. Rook's detestable confession? The result had been perpetual disturbance of mind, provoked by self-torturing speculations on the subject of the murder. If Mirabel was innocent, who was guilty?—the false wife, without pity and without shame, or the brutal husband who looked capable of any enormity? What was her future to be? how was it all to end? In the despair of that bitter moment, seeing her devoted old servant looking at her with kind, compassionate eyes, Emily's troubled spirit sought refuge in impetuous self-betrayal—the very betrayal which she had positively resolved should not escape her hardly a minute since.

She bent forward out of her corner and suddenly drew up her veil. "Do you expect to see Mr. Alban Morris when we get back?" she asked.

"I should like to see him, Miss, if you have no objection."

"Tell him I am ashamed of myself, and say I ask his pardon with all my heart!"

"The Lord be praised!" Mrs. Ellmother burst out; and then, when it was too late, remembered the conventional restraints appropriate to the occasion. "Gracious, what a fool I am!" she said to herself. "Beautiful weather, Miss Emily, isn't it?" she continued, in a desperate hurry to change the subject.

Emily reclined again in her corner of the carriage. She smiled for the first time since she had become Mrs. Delvin's guest at the Tower.

BOOK THE LAST.—AT HOME AGAIN.

CHAPTER LXIV.

MISS JETHRO SPEAKS.

REACHING the cottage at night, Emily found the cards of two visitors, who had called during the day, waiting for her. One of them had been left by Doctor Allday, who merely desired to inquire after her health; the other card bore the name of "Miss Wyvil," and had a message written on it which strongly excited Emily's curiosity.

"I have seen the telegram which tells your servant that you return to-night. Expect me early to-morrow morning, with news that will deeply interest you."

To what news did Cecilia allude? Emily questioned the woman who had been left in charge at the cottage, and found that she had next to nothing to tell. Miss Wyvil had flushed up and had looked excited

when she read the telegram—that was all. Emily's impatience was, as usual, not to be concealed. Expert Mrs. Ellmother treated the case in the right way: first with supper, and then with an adjournment to bed. The clock struck twelve when she put out the young mistress's candle. "Ten hours to pass before Cecilia comes here!" Emily exclaimed. "Not ten minutes, my dear," Mrs. Ellmother reminded her, "if you will only go to sleep."

Cecilia arrived before the breakfast-table was cleared, as lovely, as gentle, as affectionate as ever, but looking unusually serious and subdued.

"Out with it at once!" Emily cried. "What have you got to tell me?" "Perhaps I had better tell you first," Cecilia said, "that I know what you kept from me when I came here, after you left us at Monksmoor. Don't think, my dear, that I say this by way of complaint. Mr. Alban Morris believes you had good reasons for not taking me into your confidence."

"Mr. Alban Morris! Did you get your information from *him*?"

"Yes. Do I surprise you?"

"More than words can tell!"

"Can you bear another surprise? Oh, Emily, Mr. Morris is the kindest, dearest, noblest of mortal creatures; and, to make him completely perfect, he doesn't in the least know it himself."

"What has he done?" Emily asked, a little sharply.

"You shall hear, my dear, in his own words. He has 'solved the mystery at Zeeland.'" Cecilia put her pretty hand into the pocket of her cloak. "Wait a little," she said.

"I won't wait a moment! Has he discovered Miss Jethro?"

"He has indeed. And, what is more—don't, pray don't excite yourself!—he has discovered that Mr. Mirabel has been wrongly suspected of a dreadful crime. Our amiable little clergyman is guilty of being a coward—and guilty of nothing else. Are you really quiet enough to read about it?"

She handed to Emily some leaves of paper filled with writing, in Alban's hand. "Where is he?" Emily asked. "What does this mean?"

Cecilia explained. "It's Mr. Morris's own account of all that passed between Miss Jethro and himself."

"But how do *you* come by it?"

"Mr. Morris gave it to me. He said, 'Show it to Emily as soon as possible, and take care to be with her while she reads it.'"

Emily looked nervously at the manuscript in her hand. "Why doesn't he tell me himself what he has discovered? Is he"—the leaves began to flutter in her trembling fingers—"is he angry with me?"

"Oh, Emily, angry with you? My dear love, read what he has written, and then you shall know why he keeps away."

Emily opened the manuscript, and found it thus written:

"My Interview with Miss Jethro.—1. She Receives Me.

"The information which I have obtained from Miss Jethro has been communicated to me, on the condition that I shall not disclose the place of her present residence. I desire to pass out of notice as completely as if I had passed out of life; I wish to be forgotten by some, and to be unknown by others. With this one stipulation she left me free to write

the present narrative of what took place at the interview between us—if I felt that the discoveries which I had made were too important to the persons interested to be trusted to memory.

"Finding Miss Jethro's place of abode, with far less difficulty than I had anticipated (thanks to favoring circumstances), I stated plainly the object of my visit. She declined to enter into conversation with me on the subject of the murder at Zeeland.

"I was prepared to meet with this rebuff, and to take the necessary means for obtaining a more satisfactory reception. 'A person is suspected of committing the murder,' I said; 'and there is reason to believe that you are in a position to say whether the suspicion is justified or not. Do you refuse to answer me if I put the question?'

"Miss Jethro asked who the person was.

"I mentioned the name—Mr. Miles Mirabel.

"It is not necessary, and it would certainly be not agreeable to me, to describe the effect which this reply produced on Miss Jethro. After giving her time to compose herself, I entered into certain explanations in order to convince her, at the outset, of my good faith. The result justified my anticipations. I was at once admitted to her confidence.

"She said, 'I must not hesitate to do an act of justice to an innocent man; but in such a serious matter as this you have a right to judge for yourself whether the person who is now speaking to you is a person whom you can trust. You may believe that I tell the truth about others, if I begin—whatever it may cost me—in telling the truth about myself.'

"2. *She Speaks of Herself.*

"I shall not attempt to place on record the confession of a most unhappy woman. It was the common story of sin bitterly repented, and of vain effort to recover the lost place in social esteem—too well known a story, surely, to be told again.

"But I may, with perfect propriety, repeat what Miss Jethro said to me in allusion to later events in her life, which are connected with my own personal experience. She recalled to my memory a visit which she paid to me at Netherwoods, and a letter addressed to her by Doctor Allday, which I had read at her express request.

"She said, 'You may remember that the letter contained some severe reflections on my conduct. Among other things, the Doctor mentions that he called at the lodgings I occupied during my visit to London, and found I had taken to flight; also, that he had reason to believe I had entered Miss Ladd's service under false pretences.'

"I asked if the Doctor had wronged her.

"She answered, 'No. In one case he is ignorant; in the other he is right. On leaving his house I found myself followed in the street by the man to whom I owe the shame and misery of my past life. My horror of him is not to be described in words. The one way of escaping him was offered by an empty cab that passed me. I reached the railway-station safely, and went back to my home in the country. Do you blame me?'

"—'Impossible to blame her, and I said so.

confessed the deception which she had practised on Miss
' cousin,' she said, 'who was a Miss Jethro like me.

Before her marriage she had been employed as a governess. She pitied me; she sympathized with my longing to recover the character that I had lost. With her permission I made use of the testimonials which she had earned as a teacher—I was betrayed (to this day I don't know by whom)—and I was dismissed from Netherwoods. Now you know that I deceived Miss Ladd, you may reasonably conclude that I am likely to deceive you.'

"I assured her, with perfect sincerity, that I had drawn no such conclusion. Miss Jethro proceeded as follows:

"3. *She Speaks of Mirabel.*

"Four years ago, I was living near Cowes, in the Isle of Wight, in a cottage which had been taken for me by a gentleman who was the owner of a yacht. We had just returned from a short cruise, and the vessel was under orders to sail for Cherbourg with the next tide.

"While I was walking in my garden, I was startled by the sudden appearance of a man (evidently a gentleman) who was a perfect stranger to me. He was in a pitiable state of terror, and he implored my protection. In reply to my first inquiries, he mentioned the inn at Zeeland, and the dreadful death of a person unknown to him, whom I recognized (partly by the description given, and partly by comparison of dates) as Mr. James Brown. I shall say nothing of the shock inflicted on me; you don't want to know what I felt. What I did was to hide the fugitive from discovery, and to exert my influence with the owner of the yacht. Mr. Mirabel was put on board that night, and was safely landed at Cherbourg.'

"I asked what induced her to take this extraordinary interest in the fortunes of a stranger who was under suspicion of having committed a murder.

"She said, 'You shall hear my explanation directly. Let me have done with Mr. Mirabel first. We occasionally corresponded during his long absence on the Continent. In this way I knew that he had been in the wilds of Brittany when the newspaper reports of the inquest at Zeeland appeared, and that he congratulated himself on this circumstance, because he had no wish to be reminded of an event which it was the one effort of his life to forget. His last letter reached me after he had established himself at Vale Regis. Writing of the society in the neighborhood, he informed me of his introduction to Miss Wyvil, and of the invitation that he had received to meet her friend and school-fellow at Monksmoor. I knew that Miss Emily possessed a handbill describing personal peculiarities in Mr. Mirabel, not hidden under the changed appearance of his head and face. If she remembered, or happened to refer to, that description while she was living in the same house with him, there was a possibility, at least, of her suspicion being excited. The fear of this took me to you. It was a morbid fear, and, as events turned out, an unfounded fear; but I was unable to control it. Failing to produce any effect on you, I went to Vale Regis, and tried (vainly again) to induce Mr. Mirabel to send an excuse to Monksmoor. He, like you, wanted to know what my motive was. When I tell you that I acted solely in Miss Emily's interests, need I say why I was afraid to acknowledge my motive?'

"I thought of a memorable conversation between Dr. Allday and my-

self, of which Miss Jethro was ignorant. The Doctor had said, 'That ex-teacher at the school knows how the late Mr. Brown died, and how his daughter has been deceived about it.'

"Remembering this, I understood that Miss Jethro might well be afraid of the consequences if she risked any allusion to Mr. Brown's horrible death (knowing that it had been kept a secret from his daughter), and if it afterward chanced to reach Emily's ears. But this state of feeling implied an extraordinary interest in the preservation of Emily's peace of mind. I asked Miss Jethro how that interest had been excited.

"She answered, 'I can only satisfy you in one way; I must speak of her father now.'"

Emily looked up from the manuscript. She felt Cecilia's arm tenderly caressing her; she heard Cecilia say, "My darling, there is one last trial of your courage still to come. I am afraid of what you are going to read when you turn to the next page. And yet—"

"And yet," Emily replied, gently, "it must be done. I have learned my hard lesson of endurance, Cecilia; don't be afraid."

Emily turned to the next page.

"4. *She Speaks of the Dead.*"

"For the first time Miss Jethro seemed at a loss how to proceed. I could see that she was suffering. It was distressing to witness the effort that she made to control herself. She rose, and opening the drawer in her writing-table, took a letter from it.

"She said, 'Will you read this? It was written by Miss Emily's father. Perhaps it may say more for me than I can say for myself.'

"I copy the letter. It was thus expressed:

"'You have declared that our farewell to-day is our farewell forever. For the second time you have refused to be my wife; and you have done this, to use your own words, in mercy to me.

"'In mercy to me I implore you to reconsider your decision. If you condemn me to live without you—I feel it, I know it—you condemn me to despair, which I have not fortitude enough to endure. Look at the passages which I have marked for you in the New Testament. Again and again I say it—your true repentance has made you worthy of the pardon of God; are you not worthy of the love, admiration, and respect of man? Think! Oh, Sara, think of what our lives might be, and let them be lives united for time and for eternity!

"'I can write no more. A dreadful faintness oppresses me. My mind is in a state unknown to me in past years. I am in such confusion I sometimes think I hate you. And then I recover from my delusion, and know that man never loved woman as I love you.

"'You will have time to write to me by this evening's post. I shall stop at Zeeland to-morrow, on my way back, and ask for a letter at the post-office. I forbid explanations and excuses; I forbid heartless allusions to your duty. Let me have an answer which does not keep me a moment in suspense.

"'For the last time I ask you: do you consent to be my wife? Say Yes—or say No.'

"I gave her back the letter. It was needless to ask what the reply had been, except for the purpose of testifying my interest in the letter which she had permitted me to read. I put the question :

"You said No?"

"She bent her head in silence.

"I went on—not willingly, for I would have spared her if it had been possible. I said, 'He died, despairing, by his own hand, and you knew it?'

"She looked up. 'No!' she answered. 'To say that I knew it is too much; to say that I feared it is the truth.'

"Did you love him?"

"She looked at me in stern surprise. 'Have I any right to love? Could I disgrace an honorable man by allowing him to marry me? You look as if you held me responsible for his death.'

"Innocently responsible,' I said.

"She still followed her own train of thought. 'Do you suppose for a moment I could anticipate that he would destroy himself when I wrote my reply? He was a truly religious man. If he had been in his right mind he would have shrunk from the idea of suicide as from the idea of a crime.'

"On reflection I was inclined to agree with her. In his terrible position it was at least possible that the sight of the razor (placed ready with the other appliances of the toilet for his fellow-traveller's use) might have fatally tempted a maddened man, whose last hope was crushed, whose mind was tortured by despair. I should have been merciless, indeed, if I had held Miss Jethro accountable thus far. But I found it hard to sympathize with the course she had pursued in permitting Mr. Brown's death to be attributed to murder without a word of protest. I told her what was passing in my mind. 'Why were you silent?' I said.

"She smiled bitterly.

"A woman would have known why without asking,' she replied. 'A woman would have understood that I shrank from making a public confession of my shameful past life. A woman would have remembered what reasons I had for pitying the man who loved me, and for accepting any responsibility rather than associate his memory with a passion for a degraded creature, and an act of suicide. Even if I had made that cruel sacrifice, would public opinion have believed such a person as I am against the evidence of a medical man and the verdict of the jury? No, Mr. Morris! I said nothing, and I was resolved to say nothing, as long as the choice of alternatives was left to me. On the day when Mr. Mirabel implored me to save him, that choice was no longer left—and you know what I did. And now again, when suspicion (after all the long interval that has passed) has followed and found that innocent man, you know what I have done. Have you more to ask of me?'

"I have to ask your pardon for not having understood you,' I said, 'and one last favor to request. May I repeat what I have heard to the one person of all others who ought to know, and who must know, the truth?'

"It was needless to hint more plainly that I was speaking of Emily. Miss Jethro granted my request.

"It shall be as you please," she answered. "Say for me to *his* daughter that she has made this dead heart of mine feel a reviving breath of life when I think of her. She will never see me more—I implore her to pity and forget me. Farewell, Mr. Morris; farewell forever!"

"I confess that the tears came into my eyes. When I could see clearly again I was alone in the room."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE TRUE CONSOLATION.

DENIED the relief of tears, Emily closed the pages which told her that her father had died by his own hand.

Cecilia still held her tenderly embraced. By slow degrees her head drooped until it rested on her friend's bosom. Silently she suffered. Silently Cecilia bent forward and kissed her forehead. The sounds that penetrated to the room were not out of harmony with the time. From a distant house the voices of children were just audible, singing the plaintive melody of a hymn; and now and then the breeze blew the first faded leaves of autumn against the window. Neither of the girls knew how long the minutes followed each other uneventually before there was a change. Emily raised her head and looked at Cecilia.

"I have one true friend left," she said.

"Not only me, love—oh, I hope not only me!"

"Yes. Only you."

"I want to say something, Emily, but I am afraid of hurting you."

"My dear, do you remember what we once read in a book of history at school? It told of the death of a tortured man, in the old time, who was broken on the wheel. He lived through it long enough to say that the agony, after the first stroke of the club, dulled his capacity for feeling pain when the next blows fell. I fancy pain of the mind must follow the same rule. Nothing you can say will hurt me now."

"I only wanted to ask, Emily, if you were engaged at one time to marry Mr. Mirabel. Is it true?"

"False! He pressed me to consent to an engagement, and I said he must not hurry me."

"What made you say that?"

"I thought of Alban Morris."

Vainly Cecilia tried to restrain herself. A cry of joy escaped her.

"Are you glad?" Emily asked. "Why?"

Cecilia made no direct reply. "May I tell you what you wanted to know a little while since?" she said. "You asked why Mr. Morris left it all to me, instead of speaking to you himself. I put the same question to him. He pointed to what he had written. 'Not a shadow of suspicion rests on Mr. Mirabel,' he said. 'Emily is free to marry him—and free through me. Can I tell her that? For her sake and for mine it must not be. All that I can do is to leave old remembrances to plead for me. If they fail, I shall know that she will be happier with Mr. Mirabel than with me.' 'And you will submit?' I asked. 'Because I love her,' he answered, 'I must submit.' Oh, how pale you are! Have I distressed you?"

"You have done me good."

"Will you see him?"

Emily pointed to the manuscript. "At such a time as this?" she said.

"My darling, it is now, when you most want to be comforted, that you ought to see him. Who can quiet your poor aching heart as *he* can quiet it?" She impulsively snatched up the manuscript and threw it out of sight. "I can't bear to look at it," she said. "Emily, if I have done wrong will you forgive me? I saw him this morning before I came here. I was afraid of what might happen—I refused to break the dreadful news to you, unless he was somewhere near us. Your good old servant knows where to go. Let me send her—"

Mrs. Ellmother opened the door, and stood doubtful on the threshold, hysterically sobbing and laughing at the same time. "I'm everything that's bad!" the good old creature burst out. "I've been listening—I've been lying—I said you wanted him. Turn me out of my situation if you like. I've got him! Here he is!"

In another moment Emily was in his arms—and they were alone. On his faithful breast the blessed relief came to her at last; she burst out crying.

"Oh, Alban, can you forgive me?"

He gently raised her head so that he could see her face.

"My love, let me look at you," he said. "I want to think again of the day when we parted in the garden at school. Do you remember the one conviction that consoled me? I told you, Emily, there was a time of fulfillment to come in our two lives, and I have never wholly lost that dear belief. My own darling, the time has come!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

GOSSIP IN THE STUDIO.

THE winter time had arrived. Alban was cleaning his palette, after a hard day's work, in the largest room at the cottage which offered him a good light. The servant announced that tea was ready, and that Miss Ladd was waiting to see him in the next room.

Alban ran in, and received the visitor cordially with both hands. "Welcome back to England!" he said. "I needn't ask if you are better. The sea voyage has done wonders; you are looking ten years younger than when you went away."

Miss Ladd smiled. "I shall soon be ten years older again, if I go back to Netherwoods," she replied. "I didn't believe it at the time, but I know better now. Our friend, Dr. Allday, was right when he said that my working days were over. I must give up the school to a younger and stronger successor, and make the best I can in retirement of what is left of my life. You and Emily may soon expect to have me as a near neighbor. Where is Emily?"

"Far away in the north."

"In the north! You don't mean that she has gone back to Mrs. Delvin?"

"She has gone back, with Mrs. Ellmother to take care of her, at my express request. You know what Emily is when there is an act of mercy

to be done. That unhappy man has been sinking (with intervals of partial recovery) for months past. Mrs. Delvin sent word to us that the end was near, and that the one last wish her brother was able to express was the wish to see Emily. He had been for some hours unable to speak when she arrived, but he knew her and smiled faintly. He was just able to lift his hand. She took it, and waited by him, and spoke words of consolation and kindness from time to time. As the night advanced he sank into sleep, still holding her hand. They only knew that he had passed from sleep to death—passed without a movement or a sigh—when his hand turned cold. Emily remained for a day at the tower to comfort poor Mrs. Delvin; and she comes home, thank God! this evening."

"I needn't ask if you are happy?" Miss Ladd said.

"Happy? I sing when I have my bath in the morning. If that isn't happiness (in a man of my age) I don't know what is!"

"And how are you getting on?"

"Famously! I have turned portrait-painter since you were sent away for your health. A portrait of Mr. Wyvil is to decorate the town-hall in the place that he represents; and our dear kind-hearted Cecilia has induced a fascinated Mayor and Corporation to confide the work to my hands."

"Is there no hope yet of that sweet girl being married?" Miss Ladd asked. "We old maids all believe in marriage, Mr. Morris—though some of us don't own it."

"There seems to be a chance," Alban answered. "A young lord has turned up at Monksmoor; a handsome, pleasant fellow, and a rising man in politics. By my advice he sent his steam-yacht express to Rouen to fetch some of the famous pastry—just before Cecilia's birthday. All the relations gave her commonplace presents. When our young lord made his modest offering of foreign tarts you should have seen her! If I could paint that smile and those eyes I should be the greatest artist living! You may take my word for it, the pastry has helped him to produce the right impression. Need I say how rich they will be? We shall not envy them; Emily and I rejoice in prosperous circumstances. Everything is comparative. The portrait of Mr. Wyvil will be three hundred pounds in my pocket. I have earned a hundred and twenty more by illustrations since we were married. And my wife's income (I like to be particular) is only five shillings and tenpence short of two hundred a year. Moral—we are rich as well as happy."

"Without a thought of the future?" Miss Ladd asked, slyly.

"Oh, Doctor Allday has taken the future in hand! He revels in the old jokes which used to be addressed to newly-married people in his time. 'My dear fellow, you may possibly be under a joyful necessity of fetching the doctor one of these days. In that case let it be distinctly understood that I am Honorary Physician to the family.' The kind old man talks of getting me another portrait to do. 'The greatest ass in the medical profession,' he informed me, 'has just been made a baronet; and admiring friends have decided that he is to be painted at full length, with his bandy legs hidden under a gown, and his great globular eyes staring at the
—P'll get you the job.' Shall I tell you what he says of Mrs.

"What he says?" Miss Ladd repeated. "You speak of that wretch as if she was still living!"

"Certainly! Mrs. Rook is living—and, what is more, she has become a public character. It is the first case on record of any person getting over such an injury as she has received. Doctor Allday looked grave when he heard of it. 'I begin to believe in the devil,' he said; 'nobody else could have saved Mrs. Rook.' Other people don't take that view of it. She has been celebrated in all the medical newspapers, and she has been admitted to some excellent almshouses, to live in comfortable idleness to a green old age. 'The best of it is that she shakes her head when her wonderful recovery is mentioned. 'It seems such a pity,' she says; 'I was so fit for heaven!' Mr. Rook, having got rid of his wife, is in excellent spirits. He is occupied in looking after an imbecile old gentleman; and when he is asked if he likes the employment, he winks mysteriously and slaps his pocket. Now, Miss Ladd, I think it's my turn to hear some news. What have you got to tell me?"

"I think I can match your account of Mrs. Rook," Miss Ladd said.

"Do you care to hear what has become of Francine?"

Alban, rattling on hitherto in boyish high spirits, suddenly became serious. "I have no doubt Miss de Sor is doing well," he said, sternly. "She is too heartless and wicked not to prosper."

"You are getting like your old cynical self again, Mr. Morris—and you are wrong. I called this morning on the agent who had the care of Francine when I left England. When I mentioned her name, he opened a drawer in his desk, and showed me a telegram received from her father. 'There's my authority,' he said, 'for letting her leave my house.' The message was short enough to be easily remembered: 'Anything my daughter likes, as long as she doesn't come back to us.' In those cruel terms Mr. de Sor wrote of his own child. The agent was just as unfeeling in his way. He called her the victim of slighted love and clever proselytizing. "In plain words," he said, "the priest of the Catholic chapel close by has converted her, and she is now a novice in a convent of Carmelite nuns in the west of England." So far as we know now, there is the melancholy end of Francine de Sor."

As Miss Ladd spoke, the bell rang at the cottage gate. "Here she is," Alban cried, leading the way into the hall. "Emily has come home!"

THE END.

THE GHOST'S TOUCH.

Part the First.

I.

THE course of this narrative leads the reader on new and strange ground. It describes the return of a disembodied spirit to earth—not occurring in the obscurity of midnight, but in the searching light of day; neither seen as a vision, nor heard as a voice—revealing itself to mortal knowledge through the sense which is least easily self-deceived: the sense that feels.

The record of this event will of necessity produce conflicting impressions. It will raise in some minds the doubt which reason asserts; it will invigorate in other minds the hope which faith justifies; and it will leave the terrible question of the destinies of man where centuries of vain investigation have left it—in the dark.

Having undertaken in the present narrative to lead the way along a succession of events, the writer attempts no more. It is no part of his duty to follow modern examples by thrusting himself and his opinions on the public view. He returns to the shadow from which he has emerged, and leaves the opposing forces of incredulity and belief to fight the old battle over again on the old ground.

II.

The events happened soon after the first thirty years of the present century had come to an end.

On a fine morning, early in the month of April, a gentleman of middle age (named Rayburn) took his little daughter Lucy out for a walk in the woodland pleasure-ground of Western London, called Kensington Gardens.

The few friends whom he possessed reported of Mr. Rayburn (not unkindly) that he was a reserved and solitary man. He might have been more accurately described as a widower devoted to his only surviving child. Although he was not more than forty years of

age, the one pleasure which made life enjoyable to Lucy's father was offered by Lucy herself.

Playing with her ball, the child ran on to the southern limit of the Gardens, at that part of it which still remains nearest to the old Palace of Kensington. Observing close at hand one of those spacious covered seats called in England alcoves, Mr. Rayburn was reminded that he had the morning's newspaper in his pocket, and that he might do well to rest and read. At that early hour the place was a solitude. "Go on playing, my dear," he said, "but take care to keep where I can see you."

Lucy tossed up her ball, and Lucy's father opened his newspaper. He had not been reading for more than ten minutes when he felt a familiar little hand laid on his knee. "Tired of playing?" he inquired, with his eyes still on the newspaper.

"I'm frightened, papa."

He looked up directly. The child's pale face startled him. He took her on his knee and kissed her. "You oughtn't to be frightened, Lucy, when I am with you," he said, gently. "What is it?" He looked out of the alcove as he spoke, and saw a little dog among the trees. "Is it the dog?" he asked.

Lucy answered, "It's not the dog—it's the lady."

The lady was not visible from the alcove. "Has she said anything to you?" Mr. Rayburn inquired.

"No."

"What has she done to frighten you?"

The child put her arms round her father's neck. "Whisper, papa," she said; "I'm afraid of her hearing us. I think she's mad."

"Why do you think so, Lucy?"

"She came near to me. I thought she was going to say something. She seemed to be ill."

"Well? And what then?"

"She looked at me."

There Lucy found herself at a loss how to express what she had to say next, and took refuge in silence.

"Nothing very wonderful, so far," her father suggested.

"Yes, papa—but she didn't seem to see me when she looked."

"Well, and what happened then?"

"The lady was frightened—and that frightened me. I think," the child repeated, positively, "she's mad."

It occurred to Mr. Rayburn that the lady might be blind. He rose at once to set the doubt at rest. "Wait here," he said, "and I'll come back to you."

But Lucy clung to him with both hands; Lucy declared that she was afraid to be by herself. They left the alcove together.

The new point of view at once revealed the stranger, leaning against the trunk of a tree. She was dressed in the deep mourning of a widow. The pallor of her face, the glassy stare in her eyes, more than accounted for the child's terror—it excused the alarming conclusion at which she had arrived. “Go nearer to her,” Lucy whispered. They advanced a few steps. It was now easy to see that the lady was young, and wasted by illness—but (arriving at a doubtful conclusion perhaps under present circumstances) apparently possessed of rare personal attractions in happier days. As the father and daughter advanced a little she discovered them. After some hesitation she left the tree, approached with an evident intention of speaking to them, and suddenly paused. A change to astonishment and fear animated her vacant eyes. If it had not been plain before, it was now beyond all doubt that she was not a poor blind creature, deserted and helpless. At the same time the expression of her face was not easy to understand. She could hardly have looked more amazed and bewildered if the two strangers who were observing her had suddenly vanished from the place in which they stood.

Mr. Rayburn spoke to her with the utmost kindness of voice and manner.

“I am afraid you are not well,” he said. “Is there anything that I can do—”

The next words were suspended on his lips. It was impossible to realize such a state of things, but the strange impression that she had already produced on him was now confirmed. If he could believe his senses, her face did certainly tell him that he was invisible and inaudible to the woman whom he had just addressed! She moved slowly away with a heavy sigh, like a person disappointed and distressed. Following her with his eyes, he saw the dog once more—a little smooth-coated terrier of the ordinary English breed. The dog showed none of the restless activity of his race. With his head down and his tail depressed, he crouched like a creature paralyzed by fear. His mistress roused him by a call. He followed her listlessly as she turned away.

After walking a few paces only she suddenly stood still.

Mr. Rayburn heard her talking to herself. “Did I feel it again?” she said, as if perplexed by some doubt that awed or grieved her. After a while her arms rose slowly, and opened with a gentle, caressing action—an embrace strangely offered to the empty air! “No,” she said to herself, sadly, after waiting a moment. “More perhaps when to-morrow comes—no more to-day.” She looked up at the clear blue sky. “The beautiful sunlight! the merciful sunlight!” she murmured. “I should have died if it had happened in the dark.”

Once more she called to the dog, and once more she walked slowly away.

"Is she going home, papa?" the child asked.

"We will try and find out," the father answered.

He was by this time convinced that the poor creature was in no condition to be permitted to go out without some one to take care of her. From motives of humanity he was resolved on making the attempt to communicate with her friends.

III.

The lady left the Gardens by the nearest gate, stopping to lower her veil before she turned into the busy thoroughfare which leads to Kensington. Advancing a little way along the High Street, she entered a house of respectable appearance, with a card in one of the windows which announced that apartments were to let.

Mr. Rayburn waited a minute, then knocked at the door, and asked if he could see the mistress of the house. The servant showed him into a room on the ground-floor, neatly but scantily furnished. One little white object varied the grim brown monotony of the empty table. It was a visiting-card.

With a child's unceremonious curiosity Lucy pounced on the card, and spelled the name, letter by letter "Z, A, N, T," she repeated. "What does that mean?"

Her father looked at the card, as he took it away from her, and put it back on the table. The name was printed, and the address was added in pencil, "Mr John Zant, Purley's Hotel."

The mistress made her appearance. Mr Rayburn heartily wished himself out of the house again the moment he saw her. The ways in which it is possible to cultivate the social virtues are more numerous and more varied than is generally supposed. This lady's way had apparently accustomed her to meet her fellow-creatures on the hard ground of justice without mercy. Something in her eyes, when she looked at Lucy, said, "I wonder whether that child gets as much punishment as she deserves?"

"Do you wish to see the rooms which I have to let?" she began.

Mr. Rayburn at once stated the object of his visit—as clearly, as civilly, and as concisely as a man could do it. He was conscious, he added, that he had been guilty, perhaps, of an act of intrusion. The manner of the mistress of the house showed that she entirely agreed with him. He suggested, however, that his motive might excuse him. The mistress's manner changed, and asserted a difference of opinion.

"I only know the lady whom you mention," she said, "as a person of the highest respectability, in delicate health. She has taken

my first-floor apartments, with excellent references, and she gives remarkably little trouble. I have no claim to interfere with her proceedings, and no reason to doubt that she is capable of taking care of herself."

Mr. Rayburn unwisely attempted to say a word in his own defence.

"Allow me to remind you—" he began.

"Of what, sir?"

"Of what I observed when I happened to see the lady in Kensington Gardens."

"I am not responsible for what you observed in Kensington Gardens. If your time is of any value, pray don't let me detain you."

Dismissed in those terms, Mr. Rayburn took Lucy's hand and withdrew. He had just reached the door when it was opened from the outer side. The Lady of Kensington Gardens stood before him. In the position which he and his daughter now occupied, their backs were towards the window. Would she remember having seen them for a moment in the Gardens? She said her few words of apology confusedly, and advancing to the table, took up the card.

"Your servant tells me my brother-in-law called while I was out," she said to the landlady. "He sometimes leaves a message on his card." She looked for the message, and appeared to be disappointed; there was no writing on the card.

Mr. Rayburn lingered a little in the door-way, on the chance of hearing something more. The landlady's vigilant eyes discovered him. "Do you know this gentleman?" she said, maliciously, to her lodger.

"Not that I remember."

Replying in those words, the lady looked at Mr. Rayburn for the first time, and suddenly drew back from him. "Yes," she said, correcting herself; "I think we met—" Her embarrassment overpowered her; she could say no more.

Mr. Rayburn compassionately finished the sentence for her. "We met accidentally in Kensington Gardens," he said.

She seemed to be incapable of appreciating the kindness of his motive. After hesitating a little she addressed a proposal to him which seemed to show distrust of the landlady. "Will you let me speak to you up-stairs in my own rooms?" she asked.

Without waiting for a reply, she led the way to the stairs. Mr. Rayburn and Lucy followed. They were just beginning the ascent to the first floor when the spiteful landlady left the lower room, and called to her lodger over their heads,

"Take care what you say to this man, Mrs. Zant! He thinks you're mad."

Mrs. Zant turned round on the landing and looked at him. Not a word fell from her lips. She suffered, she feared, in silence. Something in the sad submission of her face touched the springs of innocent pity in Lucy's heart. The child burst out crying.

That artless expression of sympathy drew Mrs. Zant down the few stairs which separated her from Lucy. "May I kiss your dear little girl?" she said to Mr. Rayburn. The landlady, standing on the mat below, expressed her opinion of the value of caresses as compared with a sounder method of treating young persons in tears. "If that child was mine," she remarked, "I would give her something to cry for."

In the mean time Mrs. Zant led the way to her rooms.

The first words she spoke showed that the landlady had succeeded but too well in prejudicing her against Mr. Rayburn. "Will you let me ask your child," she said to him, "why you think me mad?"

He met this strange request with a firm answer. "You don't know yet what I really do think. Will you give me a minute's attention?"

"No," she said, positively. "The child pities me; I want to speak to the child. What did you see me do in the Gardens, my dear, that surprised you?" Lucy turned uneasily to her father. Mrs. Zant persisted. "I first saw you by yourself, and then I saw you with your father," she went on. "When I came nearer to you did I look very oddly—as if I didn't see you at all?" Lucy hesitated again, and Mr. Rayburn interfered.

"You are confusing my little girl," he said. "Allow me to answer your questions—or excuse me if I leave you."

There was something in his look, or in his tone, that mastered her. She put her hand to her head. "I don't think I'm fit for it," she answered, vacantly. "My courage has been sorely tried already. If I can get a little rest and sleep, you may find me a different person. I am left a great deal by myself, and I have reasons for trying to compose my mind. Can I see you to-morrow? or write to you? Where do you live?"

Mr. Rayburn laid his card on the table in silence. She had strongly excited his interest. He honestly desired to be of some service to this forlorn creature—abandoned so cruelly, as it seemed, to her own guidance. But he had no authority to exercise, no sort of claim to direct her actions, even if she consented to accept his advice. As a last resource he ventured on an allusion to the relative of whom she had spoken down-stairs.

"When do you expect to see your brother-in-law again?" he said.

"I don't know," she answered. "I should like to see him—he is so kind to me."

She turned aside to take leave of Lucy.

"Good-bye, my little friend. If you live to grow up, I hope you will never be such a miserable woman as I am." She suddenly looked round at Mr. Rayburn. "Have you got a wife at home?" she asked.

"My wife is dead."

"And *you* have a child to comfort you! Please leave me; you harden my heart. Oh, sir, don't you understand? You make me envy you!"

Mr. Rayburn was silent when he and his daughter were out in the street again. Lucy, as became a dutiful child, was silent too. But there are limits to human endurance, and Lucy's capacity for self-control gave way at last. "Are you thinking of the lady, papa?" she said.

He only answered by nodding his head. His daughter had interrupted him at that critical moment in a man's reflections when he is on the point of making up his mind. Before they were at home again Mr. Rayburn had arrived at a decision. Mrs. Zant's brother-in-law was evidently ignorant of any serious necessity for his interference, or he would have made arrangements for immediately repeating his visit. In this state of things, if any evil happened to Mrs. Zant, silence on Mr. Rayburn's part might be indirectly to blame for a serious misfortune. Arriving at that conclusion, he decided upon running the risk of being rudely received, for the second time, by another stranger.

Leaving Lucy under the care of her governess, he went at once to the address that had been written on the visiting-card left at the lodging-house, and sent in his name. A courteous message was returned. Mr. John Zant was at home, and would be happy to see him.

IV.

Mr. Rayburn was shown into one of the private sitting-rooms of the hotel.

He observed that the customary position of the furniture in a room had been, in some respects, altered. An arm-chair, a side-table, and a footstool had all been removed to one of the windows, and had been placed as close as possible to the light. On the table lay a large open roll of morocco leather, containing rows of elegant little instruments in steel and ivory. Waiting by the table stood Mr. John Zant. He said "Good-morning" in a base voice, so profound and so melodious that those two commonplace words assumed a new importance coming from his lips. His personal appearance was in harmony with his magnificent voice—he was a tall, finely

made man, of dark complexion, with big brilliant black eyes, and a noble curling beard which hid the whole lower part of his face. Having bowed with a happy mingling of dignity and politeness, the conventional side of this gentleman's character suddenly vanished, and an insane side, to all appearance, took its place. He dropped on his knees in front of the footstool. Had he forgotten to say his prayers that morning, and was he in such a hurry to remedy the fault that he had no time to spare for consulting appearances? The doubt had hardly suggested itself before it was set at rest in a most unexpected manner. Mr. Zant looked at his visitor with a bland smile, and said, "Please let me see your feet."

For the moment Mr. Rayburn lost his presence of mind. "Are you a corn-cutter?" was all he could say.

"Excuse me," returned the polite operator, "the term you use is quite obsolete in our profession." He rose from his knees, and added, modestly, "I am a chiropodist."

"I beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it! You are not, I imagine, in want of my professional services. In my leisure hours I amuse myself by practising chemical experiments, and I sometimes write in a scientific journal. Perhaps you have heard of me in that way?"

"No."

"To what motive, sir, may I attribute the honor of your visit?"

By this time Mr. Rayburn had recovered himself.

"I have come here," he answered, "under circumstances which require apology as well as explanation."

Mr. Zant's highly polished manner betrayed signs of alarm: his suspicions pointed to a formidable conclusion—a conclusion that shook him to the innermost recesses of the pocket in which he kept his money. "The numerous demands on me—" he began.

Mr. Rayburn smiled. "Make your mind easy," he replied. "I don't want money. My object is to speak with you on the subject of a lady who is a relation of yours."

"My sister-in-law!" Mr. Zant exclaimed. "Pray take a seat."

Doubting if he had chosen a convenient time for his visit, Mr. Rayburn hesitated. "Am I likely to be in the way of persons who wish to consult you?" he asked.

"Certainly not. My hours of attendance on my clients in London are from eleven to one." The clock on the mantel-piece struck the quarter-past one as he spoke. "I hope you don't bring me bad news?" he said, very earnestly. "When I called on Mrs. Zant this morning, I heard that she had gone out for a walk. Is it indiscreet to ask how you became acquainted with her?"

Mr. Rayburn at once mentioned what he had seen and heard in

Kensington Gardens, not forgetting to add a few words which described his interview afterwards with Mrs. Zant.

The lady's brother-in-law listened with an interest and sympathy which offered the strongest possible contrast to the unprovoked rudeness of the mistress of the lodging-house. He declared that he could only do justice to his sense of obligation by following Mr. Rayburn's example, and expressing himself as frankly as if he had been speaking to an old friend.

"The sad story of my sister-in-law's life," he said, "will, I think, explain certain things which must have naturally perplexed you. My brother was introduced to her at the house of an Australian gentleman on a visit to England. She was then employed as governess to his daughters. So sincere was the regard felt for her by the family that the parents had, at the entreaty of their children, asked her to accompany them when they returned to the Colony. The governess thankfully accepted the proposal."

"Had she no relations in England?" Mr. Rayburn asked.

"She was literally alone in the world, sir. When I tell you that she had been brought up in the Foundling Hospital, you will understand what I mean. Oh, there is no romance in my sister-in-law's story! She never has known, or will know, who her parents were, or why they deserted her. The happiest moment in her life was the moment when she and my brother first met. It was an instance, on both sides, of love at first sight. Though not a rich man, my brother had earned a sufficient income in mercantile pursuits. His character spoke for itself. In a word, he altered all the poor girl's prospects, as we then hoped and believed, for the better. Her employers deferred their return to Australia so that she might be married from their house. After a happy life of a few weeks only—"

His voice failed him; he paused, and turned his face from the light.

"Pardon me," he said; "I am not able, even yet, to speak composedly of my brother's death. Let me only say that the poor young wife was a widow before the happy days of the honeymoon were over. That dreadful calamity struck her down. Before my brother had been committed to the grave, her life was in danger from brain-fever."

Those words placed in a new light Mr. Rayburn's first fear that her intellect might be deranged. Looking at him attentively, Mr. Zant seemed to understand what was passing in the mind of his guest.

"No," he said; "if the opinions of the medical men are to be trusted, the result of the illness is injury to her physical strength—"

not injury to her mind. I have observed in her, no doubt, a certain waywardness of temper since her illness; but that is a trifle. As an example of what I mean, I may tell you that I invited her, on her recovery, to pay me a visit. My house is not in London—the air doesn't agree with me—my place of residence is at St. Ann's-on-Sea. I am not myself a married man; but my excellent house-keeper would have received Mrs. Zant with the utmost kindness. She was resolved—obstinately resolved, poor thing—to remain in London. It is needless to say that, in her melancholy position, I am attentive to her slightest wishes. I took a lodging for her; and, at her special request, I chose a house which was near Kensington Gardens."

"Is there any association with the Gardens which led Mrs. Zant to make that request?"

"Some association, I believe, with the memory of her husband. By-the-way, I wish to be sure of finding her at home when I call to-morrow. Did you say, in the course of your interesting statement, that she intended—as you supposed—to return to Kensington Gardens to-morrow? Or has my memory deceived me?"

"Your memory is perfectly correct."

"Thank you. I confess I am not only distressed by what you have told me of Mrs. Zant—I am at a loss to know how to act for the best. My only idea at present is to try change of air and scene. What do you think yourself?"

"I think you are right."

Mr. Zant still hesitated. "It would not be easy for me just now," he said, "to leave my patients and take her abroad."

The obvious reply to this occurred to Mr. Rayburn. A man of larger worldly experience might have felt certain suspicions, and might have remained silent. Mr. Rayburn spoke.

"Why not renew your invitation, and take her to your house at the sea-side?" he said.

In the perplexed state of Mr. Zant's mind, this plain course of action had apparently failed to present itself. His gloomy face brightened directly.

"The very thing!" he said. "I will certainly take your advice. If the air of St. Ann's does nothing else, it will improve her health, and help her to recover her good looks. Did she strike you as having been (in happier days) a pretty woman?"

This was a strangely familiar question to ask—almost an indelicate question, under the circumstances. A certain furtive expression in Mr. Zant's fine dark eyes seemed to imply that it had been put with a purpose. Was it possible that he suspected Mr. Rayburn's interest in his sister-in-law to be inspired by any motive which

was not perfectly unselfish and perfectly pure? To arrive at such a conclusion as this, might be to judge hastily and cruelly of a man who was perhaps only guilty of a want of delicacy of feeling. Mr. Rayburn honestly did his best to assume the charitable point of view. At the same time it is not to be denied that his words, when he next spoke, were carefully guarded, and that he rose to take his leave.

Mr. John Zant hospitably protested. "Why are you in such a hurry? Must you really go? I shall have the honor of returning your visit to-morrow, when I have made arrangements to profit by that excellent suggestion of yours. Good-bye. God bless you."

He held out his hand: a hand with a smooth surface and a tawny color, that fervently squeezed the fingers of a departing friend. "Is that man a scoundrel?" was Mr. Rayburn's first thought, after he had left the hotel. His moral sense set all hesitation at rest, and answered, "You're a fool if you doubt it."

Part the Second.

V.

DISTURBED by presentiments, Mr. Rayburn returned to his house on foot, by way of trying what exercise would do towards composing his mind.

The experiment failed. He went up-stairs and played with Lucy; he drank an extra glass of wine at dinner; he took the child and her governess to a circus in the evening; he ate a little supper, fortified by another glass of wine, before he went to bed—and still those vague forebodings of evil persisted in torturing him. Looking back through his past life, he asked himself if any woman (his late wife of course excepted!) had ever taken the predominant place in his thoughts which Mrs. Zant had assumed—without any discoverable reason to account for it? If he had ventured to answer his own question the reply would have been, Never!

All the next day he waited at home, in expectation of Mr. John Zant's promised visit, and waited in vain.

Towards evening the parlor-maid appeared at the family tea-table, and presented to her master an unusually large envelope, sealed with black wax, and addressed in a strange handwriting. The absence of stamp and postmark showed that it had been left at the house by a messenger.

"Who brought this?" Mr. Rayburn asked.

"A lady, sir—in deep mourning,"

"Did she leave any message?"

"No, sir."

Having drawn the inevitable conclusion, Mr. Rayburn shut himself up in his library. He was afraid of Lucy's curiosity and Lucy's questions if he read Mrs. Zant's letter in his daughter's presence.

Looking at the open envelope after he had taken out the leaves of writing which it contained, he noticed these lines traced inside the cover:

"My one excuse for troubling you, when I might have consulted my brother-in-law, will be found in the pages which I enclose. If we had been strangers in the common meaning of the word, I should not have ventured to intrude myself on your attention. But I have produced an impression on you (without any design to do so) which has set me in the light of a woman to be pitied. To speak plainly, you have been led to fear that I am not in my right senses. For this very reason I now appeal to you. Your dreadful doubt of me, sir, is my doubt too. Read what I have written about myself, and then tell me, I entreat you, which I am: a person who has been the object of a supernatural revelation? or an unfortunate creature who is only fit for imprisonment in a mad-house?"

Mr. Rayburn opened the manuscript. With steady attention, which soon quickened to breathless interest, he read what follows:

VI.

Yesterday morning the sun shone in a clear blue sky, after a succession of cloudy days, counting from the first of the month.

The radiant light had its animating effect on my poor spirits. I had passed the night more peacefully than usual, undisturbed by the dream, so cruelly familiar to me, that my lost husband is still living—the dream from which I always wake in tears. Never, since the dark days of my sorrow, have I been so little troubled by the self-tormenting fancies and fears which beset miserable women as when I left the house, and turned my steps towards Kensington Gardens—for the first time since my husband's death.

Attended by my only companion, the little dog that had been his favorite as well as mine, I went to the quiet corner of the Gardens which is nearest to Kensington.

On that soft grass, under the shade of those trees, we had loitered together in the days of our betrothal. It was his favorite walk, and he had taken me to see it in the early days of our acquaintance. There he had first asked me to be his wife. There we had felt the rapture of our first kiss. It was surely natural that I should wish to see once more a place sacred to such memories as these? I am only twenty-three years old; I have no child to comfort me, no

companion of my own age, nothing to love but the dumb creature that is so faithfully fond of me.

I went to the tree under which we stood when my dear one's eyes told his love before he could utter it in words. The sun of that vanished day shone on me again; it was the same noontide hour, the same solitude was round me. I had feared the first effect of the dreadful contrast between past and present. No! I was quiet and resigned. My thoughts, rising higher than earth, dwelled on the better life beyond the grave. Some tears came into my eyes. But I was not unhappy. My memory of all that happened may be trusted, even in trifles which relate only to myself—I was not unhappy.

The first object that I saw when my eyes were clear again was the dog. He crouched a few paces away from me, trembling pitifully, but uttering no cry. What had caused the fear that overpowered him?

I was soon to know.

I called to the dog; he remained immovable—conscious of some mysterious coming thing that held him spellbound. I tried to go to the poor creature, and fondle and comfort him.

At the first step forward that I took something stopped me.

It was not to be seen, and not to be heard. It stopped me.

The still figure of the dog disappeared from my view; the lonely scene round me disappeared—excepting the light from heaven, the tree that sheltered me, and the grass in front of me. A sense of unutterable expectation kept my eyes riveted on the grass. Suddenly I saw its myriad blades rise erect and shivering. The fear came to me of something passing over them with the invisible swiftness of the wind. The shivering advanced. It was all round me. It crept into the leaves of the trees over my head; they shuddered, without a sound to tell of their agitation; their pleasant, natural rustling was struck dumb. The songs of the birds had ceased. The cries of the water-fowl on the pond were heard no more. There was a dreadful silence.

But the lovely sunshine poured down on me as brightly as ever.

In that dazzling light, in that fearful silence, I felt an Invisible Presence near me.

It touched me gently.

At the touch my heart throbbed with an overwhelming joy. Exquisite pleasure thrilled through every nerve in my body. I knew him! From the unseen world—himself unseen—he had returned to me. Oh, I knew him!

And yet my helpless mortality longed for a sign that might give me assurance of the truth. The yearning in me shaped itself into

words. I tried to utter the words. I would have said, if I could have spoken, "Oh, my angel, give me a token that it is you!" But I was like a person struck dumb—I could only think it.

The Invisible Presence read my thought. I felt my lips touched, as my husband's lips used to touch them when he kissed me. And that was my answer. A thought came to me again. I would have said, if I could have spoken, "Are you here to take me to the better world?"

I waited. Nothing that I could feel touched me.

I was conscious of thinking once more. I would have said, if I could have spoken, "Are you here to protect me?"

I felt myself held in a gentle embrace, as my husband's arms used to hold me when he pressed me to his breast. And that was my answer.

The touch, that was like the touch of his lips, lingered and was lost; the clasp, that was like the clasp of his arms, pressed me and fell away. The garden scene resumed its natural aspect. I saw a human creature near, a lovely little girl looking at me.

At that moment, when I was my own lonely self again, the sight of the child soothed and attracted me. I advanced, intending to speak to her. To my horror I suddenly ceased to see her. She disappeared as if I had been stricken blind.

And yet I could see the landscape round me; I could see the heaven above me. A time passed—only a few minutes, as I thought—and the child became visible to me again, walking hand-in-hand with her father. I approached them; I was close enough to see that they were looking at me with pity and surprise. My impulse was to ask if they saw anything strange in my face or my manner. Before I could speak, the horrible wonder happened again. They vanished from my view.

Was the Invisible Presence still near? Was it passing between me and my fellow-mortals, forbidding communication in that place and at that time?

It must have been so. When I turned away in my ignorance, with a heavy heart, the dreadful blankness which had twice shut out from me the beings of my own race was not between me and my dog. The poor little creature filled me with pity; I called him to me. He moved at the sound of my voice, and followed me languidly, not quite awakened yet from the trance of terror that had possessed him.

Before I had retired by more than a few steps I thought I was conscious of the Presence again. I held out my longing arms to it. I waited in the hope of a touch to tell me that I might return. Perhaps I was answered by indirect means? I only know that a resolu-

tion to return to the same place, at the same hour, came to me, and quieted my mind.

The morning of the next day was dull and cloudy, but the rain held off. I set forth again to the Gardens.

My dog ran on before me into the street and stopped, waiting to see in which direction I might lead the way. When I turned towards the Gardens he dropped behind me. In a little while I looked back. He was following me no longer; he stood irresolute. I called to him. He advanced a few steps, hesitated, and ran back to the house.

I went on by myself. Shall I confess my superstition? I thought the dog's desertion of me a bad omen.

Arrived at the tree, I placed myself under it. The minutes followed one another uneventfully. The cloudy sky darkened. The dull surface of the grass showed no shuddering consciousness of an unearthly creature passing over it.

I still waited, with an obstinacy which was fast becoming the obstinacy of despair. How long an interval elapsed, while I kept watch on the ground before me, I am not able to say. I only know that a change came.

Under the dull gray light I saw the grass move—but not as it had moved on the day before. It shrivelled as if a flame had scorched it. No flame appeared. The brown, underlying earth showed itself winding onward in a thin strip—which might have been a foot-path traced in fire. It frightened me. I longed for the protection of the Invisible Presence; I prayed for a warning of it if danger was near.

A touch answered me. It was as if a hand unseen had taken my hand—had raised it, little by little—had left it, pointing to the scorched brown path that wound towards me over the grass.

I looked to the far end of the path.

By fine degrees a Shadow rose in the distance. Higher and higher it grew, while it moved nearer and nearer. It advanced to the place in which I stood. The unseen hand closed on my hand with a warning pressure: the revelation of the coming danger was near me—I waited for it; I saw it.

The central depths of the Shadow opened, and showed slowly the glimmer of a ghastly light.

In the light a man's face appeared. It looked at me. It was the face of my husband's brother—John Zant.

The consciousness of myself as a living creature left me. I knew nothing, I felt nothing; I was dead.

When the torture of revival made me open my eyes, I found myself on the grass. Gentle hands raised my head at the moment

when I recovered my senses. Who had brought me to life again? Who was taking care of me?

I looked upward and saw, bending over me, John Zant.

VII.

There the manuscript ended.

Some lines had been added on the last page, but they had been so carefully erased as to be illegible. These words of explanation appeared below the cancelled sentences:

"I had begun to write the little that remains to be told, when it struck me that I might, unintentionally, be exercising an unfair influence on your opinion. Let me only remind you that I believe absolutely in the supernatural revelation which I have endeavored to describe. Remember this—and decide for me what I dare not decide for myself."

There was no serious obstacle in the way of compliance with this request.

Judged from the point of view of the materialist, Mrs. Zant might no doubt be the victim of illusions (produced by a diseased state of the nervous system), which have been known to exist—as in the celebrated case of the bookseller, Nicolai, of Berlin—without being accompanied by derangement of the intellectual powers. But Mr. Rayburn was not asked to solve any such intricate problem as this. He had been merely instructed to read the manuscript, and to say what impression it had left on him of the mental condition of the writer, whose doubt of herself had been, in all probability, first suggested by remembrance of the illness from which she had suffered—brain-fever.

Under these circumstances there could be little difficulty in forming an opinion. The memory which had recalled, and the judgment which had arranged, the succession of events related in the narrative spoke for themselves, and revealed a mind in full possession of all its resources.

Having satisfied himself so far, Mr. Rayburn abstained from considering the more serious question suggested by what he had read.

At any time his habits of life and his ways of thinking would have rendered him unfit to weigh the arguments which assert or deny supernatural interposition among the creatures of earth. But his mind was now so disturbed by the startling record of experience which he had just read, that he was only conscious of feeling certain impressions—without possessing the capacity to reflect on them. That his anxiety on Mrs. Zant's account had been increased, and that his doubts of Mr. John Zant had been encouraged, were the only practical results of the confidence placed in him of which he was

thus far aware. In the ordinary exigencies of life a man of hesitating disposition, his interest in Mrs. Zant's welfare, and his desire to discover what had passed between her brother-in-law and herself after their meeting in the Gardens, urged him into instant action. In half an hour more he had arrived at her lodgings. He was at once admitted.

VIII.

Mrs. Zant was alone in an imperfectly lighted room. "I hope you will excuse the bad light," she said; "my head has been burning as if the fever had come back again. Oh, don't go away! After what I have suffered, you don't know how dreadful it is to be alone." The tone of her voice told him that she had been crying. He at once tried the best means of setting the poor lady at ease by telling her of the conclusion at which he had arrived after reading her manuscript. The happy result showed itself instantly: her face brightened, her manner changed; she was eager to hear more.

"Have I produced any other impression on you?" she asked.

He understood the allusion. Expressing sincere respect for her own convictions, he told her honestly that he was not prepared to say more. Grateful for the tone in which he had answered her, she wisely and delicately changed the subject.

"I must speak to you of my brother-in-law," she said. "He has told me of your visit, and I am anxious to know what you think of him. Do you like Mr. John Zant?"

Mr. Rayburn hesitated.

The care-worn look appeared again in her face. "If you had felt as kindly towards him as he feels towards you," she said, "I might have gone to St. Ann's with a lighter heart."

Mr. Rayburn thought of the supernatural appearances described at the close of her narrative. "You believe in that terrible warning," he remonstrated, "and yet you go to your brother-in-law's house!"

"I believe," she answered, "in the spirit of the man who loved me in the days of his earthly bondage. I am under *his* protection. What have I to do but to cast away my fears, and to wait in faith and hope? It might have helped my resolution if a friend had been near to encourage me." She paused, and smiled sadly. "I must remember," she resumed, "that your way of understanding my position is not my way. I ought to have told you that Mr. John Zant feels needless anxiety about my health. He declares that he will not lose sight of me until his mind is at ease. It is useless to attempt to alter his opinion. He says my nerves are shattered—and who that sees me can doubt it? He tells me that my only chance of getting better is to try change of air and perfect repose—how can I

contradict him? He reminds me that I have no relation but himself, and no house open to me but his own—and God knows he is right!"

She said those last words in accents of melancholy resignation, which grieved the good man whose one merciful purpose was to serve and console her. He spoke impulsively, with the freedom of an old friend.

"I want to know more of you and Mr. John Zant than I know now," he said. "My motive is a better one than mere curiosity. Do you believe that I feel a sincere interest in you?"

"With my whole heart."

That reply encouraged him to proceed with what he had to say. "When you recovered from your fainting-fit," he began, "Mr. John Zant asked questions, of course?"

"He asked what could possibly have happened, in such a quiet place as Kensington Gardens, to make me faint."

"And how did you answer?"

"Answer? I couldn't even look at him!"

"You said nothing?"

"Nothing. I don't know what he thought of me; he might have been surprised, or he might have been offended."

"Is he easily offended?" Mr. Rayburn asked.

"Not in my experience of him."

"Do you mean your experience of him before your illness?"

"Yes. Since my recovery his engagements with patients have kept him away from London. I have not seen him since he took these lodgings for me. But he is always considerate. He has written more than once to beg that I will not think him neglectful, and to tell me (what I knew already through my poor husband) that he has no money of his own, and must live by his profession."

"In you husband's lifetime were the two brothers on good terms?"

"Always. The one complaint I ever heard my husband make of John Zant was that he didn't come to see us often enough after our marriage. Is there some wickedness in him which we have never suspected? It may be—but *how* can it be? I have every reason to be grateful to the man against whom I have been supernaturally warned! His conduct to me has been always perfect. I can't tell you what I owe to his influence in quieting my mind when the dreadful doubt arose about my husband's death."

"Do you mean doubt if he died a natural death?"

"Oh no, no! He was dying of rapid consumption—but his sudden death took the doctors by surprise. One of them thought that he might have taken an overdose of his sleeping drops by mistake. The other overruled him, or there might have been an inquest in

the house. Oh, don't speak of it any more! Let us talk of something else. Tell me when I shall see you again."

"I hardly know. When do you and your brother-in-law leave London?"

"To-morrow." She looked at Mr. Rayburn with a piteous entreaty in her eyes; she said, timidly, "Do you ever go to the sea-side, and take your dear little girl with you?"

The request, at which she had only dared to hint, touched on the idea which was at that moment in Mr. Rayburn's mind.

Interpreted by his strong prejudice against John Zant, what she had said of her brother-in-law filled him with forebodings of peril to herself; all the more powerful in their influence for this reason—that he shrank from distinctly realizing them. If another person had been present at the interview, and had said to him afterwards, "That man's reluctance to visit his sister-in-law while her husband was living is associated with a secret sense of guilt which her innocence cannot even imagine; he, and he alone, knows the cause of her husband's sudden death; his feigned anxiety about her health is adopted as the safest means of enticing her into his house"—if those formidable conclusions had been urged on Mr. Rayburn, he would have felt it his duty to reject them as unjustifiable aspersions on an absent man. And yet, when he took leave that evening of Mrs. Zant, he had pledged himself to give Lucy a holiday at the sea-side, and he had said, without blushing, that the child really deserved it, as a reward for general good conduct and attention to her lessons!

IX.

Three days later the father and daughter arrived towards evening at St. Ann's - on - Sea. They found Mrs. Zant waiting at the station.

The poor woman's joy on seeing them expressed itself like the joy of a child. "Oh, I am so glad! so glad!" was all she could say when they met. Lucy was half smothered with kisses, and was made supremely happy by a present of the finest doll she had ever possessed. Mrs. Zant accompanied her friends to the rooms which had been secured at the hotel. She was able to speak confidentially to Mr. Rayburn, while Lucy was in the balcony hugging her doll, and looking at the sea.

The one event that had happened during Mrs. Zant's short residence at St. Ann's was the departure of her brother-in-law that morning for London. He had been called away for a few hours by business; his house-keeper expected that he would return in time for dinner.

As to his conduct towards Mrs. Zant, he was not only as attentive as ever—he was almost oppressively affectionate in his language and manner. There was no service that a man could render which he had not eagerly offered to her. He declared that he already perceived an improvement in her health; he congratulated her on having decided to stay in his house; and (as a proof, perhaps, of his sincerity) he had repeatedly pressed her hand. "Have you any idea what all this means?" she said, simply.

Mr. Rayburn kept his idea to himself. He professed ignorance, and asked next what sort of person the house-keeper was.

Mrs. Zant shook her head ominously.

"Such a strange creature," she said, "and in the habit of taking such liberties, that I begin to be afraid she is a little crazy."

"Is she an old woman?"

"No—only middle-aged. This morning, after her master had left the house, she actually asked me what I thought of my brother-in-law! I told her, as coldly as possible, that I thought he was very kind. She was quite insensible to the tone in which I had spoken; she went on from bad to worse. 'Do you call him the sort of man who would take the fancy of a young woman?' was her next question. She actually looked at me (I might have been wrong, and I hope I was) as if the 'young woman' she had in her mind was myself! I said, 'I don't think of such things, and I don't talk about them.' Still, she was not in the least discouraged; she made a personal remark next: 'Excuse me—but you do look wretchedly pale.' I thought she seemed to enjoy the defect in my complexion; I really believe it raised me in her estimation. She invited me to go downstairs with her, and look at the master's workshop. The place was a puzzle to her—and she would like to have my opinion on it. 'He mixes things in his workshop,' she said—'I mean things that he powders and things that he boils. Sometimes they burst, and make a noise; and sometimes they hiss, and make a smell. Poisons, I dare say. Come and have a look at the place; I know where he keeps the key.' Of course I refused. She was just as friendly and familiar as ever. 'We shall get on better in time,' she said; 'I'm beginning to like you.' She walked out humming a tune. Don't you agree with me? Don't you think she's crazy?"

"I think you were quite right not to accompany her to the scene of her master's chemical experiments. Does she look as if she might have been a pretty woman at one time of her life?"

"Not the sort of pretty woman whom I admire!"

Mr. Rayburn smiled. "I was thinking," he resumed, "that this person's odd conduct may perhaps be accounted for. She is probably jealous of any young lady who is invited to her master's house

—and, till she noticed your complexion, she began by being jealous of you.”

Innocently at a loss to understand how *she* could become an object of the house-keeper's jealousy, Mrs. Zant looked at Mr. Rayburn in astonishment. Before she could give expression to her feeling of surprise, there was an interruption—a welcome interruption. A waiter entered the room, and announced a visitor, described as “a gentleman.”

Mrs. Zant at once rose to retire.

“Who is the gentleman?” Mr. Rayburn asked, detaining Mrs. Zant as he spoke.

A voice which they both recognized answered gayly from the outer side of the door,

“A friend from London.”

Part the Third.

X.

“WELCOME to St. Ann's!” cried Mr. John Zant. “I knew that you were expected, my dear sir, and I took my chance of finding you at the hotel.” He turned to his sister-in-law, and kissed her hand with an elaborate gallantry worthy of Sir Charles Grandison himself. “When I reached home, my dear, and heard that you had gone out, I guessed that your object was to receive our excellent friend. You have not felt lonely while I have been away? That's right! that's right!” He looked towards the balcony, and discovered Lucy at the open window, staring at the magnificent stranger. “Your little daughter, Mr. Rayburn? Dear child! Come and kiss me.”

Lucy answered in one positive word—“No.”

Mr. John Zant advanced to the window, smiling superbly. “Show me your doll, darling,” he said. “Sit on my knee.”

Lucy answered in two positive words—“I won't.”

Her father approached the window to administer the necessary reproof. Mr. John Zant interfered in the cause of mercy with his best grace. He held up his hands in meek entreaty. “Dear Mr. Rayburn! The fairies are sometimes shy; and *this* little fairy doesn't take to strangers at first sight. Dear child! All in good time. And what stay do you make at St. Ann's? May we hope that our poor attractions will tempt you to prolong your visit?”

He put his flattering little question with an ease of manner which was rather too plainly assumed; and he looked at Mr. Rayburn with

a watchfulness which appeared to attach undue importance to the reply. When he said, "What stay do you make at St. Ann's?" did he really mean, "How soon do you leave us?" Mr. Rayburn answered, cautiously, that his stay at the sea-side would depend on circumstances. Mr. John Zant looked at his sister-in-law, sitting silent in a corner with Lucy on her lap. "Exert your attractions," he said; "make the circumstances agreeable to our good friend. Will you dine with us to-day, my dear sir, and bring your little fairy with you?"

Lucy was far from receiving this complimentary allusion in the spirit in which it had been offered. "I'm not a fairy," she declared. "I'm a child."

"And a naughty child," her father added, with all the severity that he could assume.

"I can't help it, papa; the man with the big beard puts me out."

The man with the big beard was amused—amiably, paternally amused—by Lucy's plain speaking. He repeated his invitation to dinner, and he did his best to look disappointed when Mr. Rayburn made the necessary excuses.

"Another day," he said (without, however, fixing the day). "I think you will find my house comfortable. My experiments, when I amuse myself in that way, seldom offend the nostrils of visitors; and my house-keeper may perhaps be eccentric—but in all essentials a woman in a thousand. Do you feel the change from London already? Our air at St. Ann's is really worthy of its reputation. Invalids who come here are cured as if by magic. What do you think of Mrs. Zant? How does she look?"

Mr. Rayburn was evidently expected to say that she looked better. He said it. Mr. John Zant seemed to have anticipated a stronger expression of opinion.

"Surprisingly better!" he pronounced. "Infinitely better! We ought both to be grateful. Pray believe that we *are* grateful."

"If you mean grateful to me," Mr. Rayburn remarked, "I don't quite understand—"

"You don't quite understand! Is it possible that you have forgotten our conversation when I first had the honor of receiving you? Look at Mrs. Zant again."

Mr. Rayburn looked; and Mrs. Zant's brother-in-law explained himself.

"You notice the return of her color, the healthy brightness of her eyes. (No, my dear, I am not paying you idle compliments; I am stating plain facts.) For that happy result, Mr. Rayburn, we are indebted to you."

"Surely not!"

"Surely yes! It was at your valuable suggestion that I thought of inviting my sister-in-law to visit me at St. Ann's. Ah, you remember it now. Forgive me if I look at my watch; the dinner-hour is on my mind. Not, as your dear little daughter there seems to think, because I am greedy, but because I am always punctual, in justice to the cook. Shall we see you to-morrow? Call early, and you will find us at home."

He gave Mrs. Zant his arm, and bowed and smiled, and kissed his hand to Lucy, and left the room. Thinking over the interview at the hotel in London, Mr. Rayburn now understood John Zant's object (on that occasion) in assuming the character of a helpless man in need of a sensible suggestion. If Mrs. Zant's residence under his roof became associated with evil consequences, he could declare that she would never have entered the house but for Mr. Rayburn's advice.

With the next day came the hateful necessity of returning this man's visit. Mr. Rayburn was placed between two alternatives. In Mrs. Zant's interests he must remain, no matter at what sacrifice of his own inclinations, on good terms with her brother-in-law, or he must return to London, and leave the poor woman to her fate. His choice, it is needless to say, was never a matter of doubt. He called at the house, and did his innocent best—without in the least deceiving Mr. John Zant—to make himself agreeable during the short duration of his visit. Descending the stairs on his way out, accompanied by Mrs. Zant, he was surprised to see a middle-aged woman in the hall, who looked as if she was waiting there expressly to attract notice.

"The house-keeper," Mrs. Zant whispered. "She is impudent enough to try to make acquaintance with you."

This was exactly what the house-keeper was waiting in the hall to do.

"I hope you like our watering-place, sir," she began. "If I can be of service to you, pray command me. Any friend of this lady's has a claim on me—and you are an old friend, no doubt. I am only the house-keeper, but I presume to take a sincere interest in Mrs. Zant; and I am indeed glad to see you here. We none of us know—do we?—how soon we may want a friend. No offence, I hope? Thank you, sir. Good-morning."

There was nothing in the woman's eyes which indicated an unsettled mind; nothing in the appearance of her lips which suggested habits of intoxication. That her strange outburst of familiarity proceeded from some strong motive seemed to be more than probable. Putting together what Mrs. Zant had already told him, and

what he had himself observed, Mr. Rayburn was inclined to believe that the motive might be found in the house-keeper's jealousy of her master.

XI.

The suggestive events of the day were not at an end yet.

At the moment when John Zant's door closed behind him, Mr. Rayburn was recognized by an old friend passing in the street—a person of celebrity in the world of science, who was professor of chemistry at one of the London hospitals.

"What! have *you* been submitting your feet to Mr. Zant?" asked the professor, pointing to the brass plate on the door.

Mr. Rayburn explained that he had only been paying an ordinary visit.

"Ah, you know him? Well, as an operator, I cannot speak too highly of your friend. He has set right a rather serious mistake made, in my case, by the corn-cutter whom I am accustomed to employ in London. In other respects he is one of the queerest characters I have met with for many a long day past."

"In what way, may I ask?"

The professor took his friend's arm. They walked along the esplanade together.

"We live," said the chemist, "in an age when literature, art, and science are all alike invaded by the omnipresent amateur. Mr. John Zant is an amateur who practises what he calls 'occult chemistry' in his leisure hours. While he was operating on my foot, he applied the soothing influence of flattery, delicately laid on; and when he had done (if I may use a coarse expression) he pumped me in my scientific capacity without mercy. The fellow—I beg your pardon; I forgot he was a friend of yours; let us say the accomplished amateur—has collected some curious old books relating to chemistry, and has founded on them some absurd theories of his own. One of these theories is, that the old superstition which once believed in the 'Elixir of Love,' actually rests on a basis of chemical truth. There are drugs, he was good enough to remind me, which affect the mind through the body, and which may so influence the intellectual powers as to place the will of one person at the mercy of the will of another. 'In that way,' says Mr. John Zant, 'I account for the wonders said to have been performed by the Love Draughts mentioned in this old book!' He turned over a few pages, and pointed to a recipe, or prescription, which, as he thought, justified his opinion. But he would like to know, he informed me, if my wonderful etcetera, etcetera, confirmed him in his own view. His plausible impudence—I beg your pardon again; we will say his

thirst for knowledge—was really as good as a play. But there was one serious side to the nonsense that he talked. I led him on, I am ashamed to say, for my own amusement, until I made a discovery which I had not bargained for. The man is ignorantly meddling with two chemical ingredients, which may produce disastrous results if he attempts to put his theories to the test. He denies that he has an intention of doing this—excepting, perhaps, in the case of some unfortunate animal. Whether there is any good reason to believe him we won't stop to inquire. My last words at parting gave him a warning, which I hope will have its effect. It might not be amiss if you exerted your influence over your friend. Tell him to take that small metal case which he brought with him from London out in a boat, and when he gets into deep water to throw it overboard. Are you staying at St. Ann's? I'm here in lodgings with my wife till the end of the week. There is the address; come and see us."

Reflecting in the solitude of his own room, Mr. Rayburn felt that the one prudent course to take would be to remove Mrs. Zant from St. Ann's. He tried to prepare her cautiously for this strong proceeding when she came the next day to take Lucy out for a walk.

"If you still regret having forced yourself to accept your brother-in-law's invitation," was all he ventured to say, "don't forget that you are perfect mistress of your own actions. You have only to come to me at the hotel, and I will take you back to London by the next train."

She positively refused to entertain the idea. "I should be a thankless creature indeed," she said, "if I accepted your proposal. Do you think I am ungrateful enough to involve you in a personal quarrel with John Zant? No! If I find myself forced to leave the house I will go away alone."

There was no moving her from this resolution. When she and Lucy had gone out together, Mr. Rayburn remained at the hotel, with a mind ill at ease. A man of readier mental resources might have felt at a loss how to act for the best in the emergency that now confronted him. While he was still as far as ever from arriving at a decision, some person knocked at the door.

Had Mrs. Zant returned? He looked up as the door was opened, and saw, to his astonishment, Mr. John Zant's house-keeper.

"I hope I have not done wrong," she said; "I have allowed your little girl, sir, to go to the beach with a playfellow. We met the child with her mother at the door of the hotel. The lady said she was sure you would not object—"

"The lady is quite right," Mr. Rayburn interposed. "But how is it that you are in charge of Lucy? Where is Mrs. Zant?"

"Mrs. Zant is not well, sir. At least so I am told. It happened, as I hear, while she was passing our house door; and I had my master's orders to bring Miss Lucy back. Before I go away," she added, confidentially, "I should like to say a word in Mrs. Zant's interests. Take the lady out of our house—and lose no time in doing it."

Mr. Rayburn was on his guard. He merely asked, "Why?"

The house-keeper answered in a curiously indirect manner—partly in jest, as it seemed, and partly in earnest.

"When a man has lost his wife," she said, "there's some difference of opinion in Parliament, as I hear, whether he does right or wrong if he marries his wife's sister. Wait a bit! I'm coming to the point. My master is one who has a long head on his shoulders; he sees consequences which escape the notice of people like me. In his way of thinking, if one man may marry his wife's sister, and no harm done, where's the objection if another man pays a compliment to the family, and marries his brother's widow. My master, if you please, is that other man. Take the widow away before she marries him."

This was beyond endurance. "You insult Mrs. Zant," Mr. Rayburn answered, "if you suppose that such a thing is possible!"

"Oh! I insult her, do I? Listen to me. One of three things will happen. She will be entrapped into consenting to it—or frightened into consenting to it—or drugged into consenting to it—"

Mr. Rayburn was too indignant to let her go on. "You are talking nonsense," he said. "There can be no marriage; the law forbids it."

"Are you one of the people who see no farther than their noses?" she asked, insolently. "Won't the law take his money? Is he obliged to mention that he is related to her by marriage when he buys the license?" She paused; her humor changed; she stamped furiously on the floor. The true motive that animated her showed itself in her next words, and warned Mr. Rayburn to grant a more favorable hearing than he had accorded to her yet. "If you won't stop it," she burst out, "I will! If he marries anybody, he is bound to marry ME! Will you take her away? I ask you, for the last time—*will* you take her away?"

The tone in which she made that final appeal to him had its effect. "I will go back with you to John Zant's house," he said, "and judge for myself."

She laid her hand on his arm: "I must go first—or you may not be let in. Follow me in five minutes; and don't knock at the street door."

She left him instantly. He reckoned five minutes by his watch and followed her. She was waiting for him behind the door. "They are both in the drawing-room," she whispered, leading the way up-stairs. "Step softly, and take him by surprise."

With a dextrous hand she noiselessly opened the door, and let him into the room.

XII.

A table of oblong shape stood midway between the drawing-room walls. At the end of it which was nearest to the door John Zant was seated, stirring some liquid in a silver cup. Taken completely by surprise, he showed himself in his true character. He started to his feet, and protested with an oath against the intrusion which had been committed on him. Heedless of his action and his language, Mr. Rayburn could look at nothing, could think of nothing but Mrs. Zant.

She was standing at the opposite end of the table, in the full flow of sunlight pouring at that moment into the room. Her eyes looked out straight before her—as void of all expression as if they had been eyes composed in sleep. Her lips were a little parted; her head drooped slightly towards her shoulder, in an attitude which suggested listening for something or waiting for something. Perfectly insensible to the sudden opening of the door, to her brother-in-law's violence, to the words of sympathy which Mr. Rayburn addressed to her, there she stood between the two men, a living creature, self-isolated in a stillness like the stillness of death.

John Zant's voice broke the silence. His temper was under control again: he had his reasons for still remaining on friendly terms with Mr. Rayburn.

"I am sorry I forgot myself just now," he said. "We are both of us naturally anxious about *her*." He pointed to his sister-in-law, and went on stirring the liquid in the silver cup.

"When did this happen?" Mr. Rayburn asked.

"Not half an hour ago—just as she was at the door of this house. I was fortunately at home. Without speaking to me, without noticing me, she walked up the stairs, like a person in a dream. She placed herself where she stands now. She has not moved since. It's a nervous seizure of a peculiar kind—something resembling catalepsy, as you see."

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

"A doctor is not wanted."

"I beg your pardon. It seems to me that medical help is absolutely necessary."

"Be so good, sir, as to remember that the decision rests with me,

as the lady's relative. I understand the nature of the attack, and I am about to apply the remedy."

Mr. Rayburn approached him, determined to get possession of the cup. "A remedy of your own devising?" he asked, moving a little nearer.

His face probably betrayed him. John Zant increased the distance between them. Advancing round the right side of the table, he drew near to Mrs. Zant. She moved before he had passed over the space between them; her still figure began to tremble. She lifted her drooping head. For a moment there was a shrinking in her, as if she had been suddenly touched by something. She seemed to recognize the touch: she was still again.

John Zant watched the change.

"She is beginning to recover her senses," he said; "the remedy will help her."

He advanced again; he passed into the flood of sunlight flowing over her. Mr. Rayburn followed him, determined to prevent it if he offered the cup. He waited a little, closely observing her.

"Rouse yourself," he said.

She remained in the same position, absorbed in her thought or in her dream.

"Rouse yourself," he repeated, "and drink this."

At the instant when he held it out to her—at the instant when Mr. Rayburn's hand was lifted to seize it—the cup dropped from his fingers. His arm remained out-stretched. With a shriek of horror he struggled to draw it back—struggled, in the empty brightness of the sunshine, as if some invisible grip had seized him. "What has got me?" the wretch screamed. "Who is holding me? Oh, the cold of it! the cold of it!" His features became convulsed; his eyes turned upward until only the white eyeballs were visible. He fell prostrate with a crash that shook the room.

The house-keeper heard it and rushed in. She knelt by her master's body. With one hand she loosened his cravat, with the other she pointed to the end of the table.

Mrs. Zant still kept her place; but there was another change. Little by little her eyes recovered their natural living expression, then slowly closed. She tottered backward from the table, and lifted her hands wildly as if to grasp at something which might support her. Mr. Rayburn hurried to her before she fell, lifted her in his arms, and carried her out of the room.

One of the household servants met them in the hall. He sent her for a carriage. In a quarter of an hour more Mrs. Zant was safe under his care at the hotel.

XIII.

That night a note written by the house-keeper was delivered to Mrs. Zant.

"The doctors give little hope. The paralytic stroke is spreading upward to his face. If death spares him he will live a helpless man. I shall take care of him to the last. As for you—forget him."

Mrs. Zant gave the note to Mr. Rayburn.

"Read it, and destroy it," she said. "It is written in ignorance of the terrible truth."

He obeyed, and looked at her in silence, waiting to hear more. She hid her face. The few words that she addressed to him, after a struggle with herself, fell slowly and reluctantly from her lips.

She said, "No mortal hand held the hand of John Zant. The guardian spirit was with me. The promised protection was with me. I know it. I wish to know no more."

Having spoken, she rose and gave him her hand. He opened the door for her, seeing that she needed rest in her own room.

Left by himself, he began to consider the prospect that was before him in the future. How was he to regard the woman who had just left him? As a poor creature weakened by disease, the victim of her own nervous delusion? or as the chosen object of a supernatural revelation—unparalleled by any similar revelation that he had heard of, or had found recorded in books? His first discovery of the place that she really held in his estimation dawned on his mind when he felt himself recoiling from the conclusion which presented her to his pity, and yielding to the nobler conviction which felt with her faith and raised her to a place apart among other women.

XIV.

They left St. Ann's the next day.

Arrived at the end of the journey, Lucy held fast by Mrs. Zant's hand. Tears were rising in the child's eyes. "Are we to bid her good-bye?" she said, sadly, to her father.

He seemed to be unwilling to trust himself to speak; he only said. "My dear, ask her yourself."

But the result justified him. Lucy was happy again.

MY LADY'S MONEY:

AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF A YOUNG GIRL.

PERSONS OF THE STORY.

WOMEN.

LADY LYDIARD (*Widow of Lord Lydiard*).
ISABEL MILLER (*her adopted Daughter*).
MISS PINK (*of South Morden*).
THE HON. MRS. DRUMBLADE (*Sister of the Hon. Alfred Hardyman*).

MEN.

THE HON. ALFRED HARDYMAN (*of the Stud Farm*).
MR. FELIX SWEETSIN (*Lady Lydiard's Nephew*).
ROBERT MOODY (*Lady Lydiard's Factotum*).
MR. TROY (*Lady Lydiard's Lawyer*).
OLD SHARON (*in the By-ways of Legal Bohemia*).

ANIMAL.

TOMMIE (*Lady Lydiard's Dog*).

Part the First.

THE DISAPPEARANCE.

CHAPTER I.

OLD Lady Lydiard sat meditating by the fireside, with three letters lying open on her lap.

Time had discolored the paper and had turned the ink to a brownish hue. The letters were all addressed to the same person—"THE RIGHT HON. LORD LYDIARD"—and were all signed in the same way—"Your affectionate cousin, James Tollmidge." Judged by these specimens of his correspondence, Mr. Tollmidge must have possessed one great merit as a letter-writer—the merit of brevity. He will weary nobody's patience, if he is allowed to have a hearing. Let him, therefore, be permitted, in his own highflown way, to speak for himself.

First letter: "My statement, as your lordship requests, shall be short and to the point. I was doing very well as a portrait painter

in the country, and I had a wife and children to consider. Under these circumstances, if I had been left to decide for myself, I should certainly have waited until I had saved a little money before I ventured on the serious expense of taking a house and studio at the west end of London. Your lordship, I positively declare, encouraged me to try the experiment without waiting. And here I am, unknown and unemployed, a helpless artist, lost in London, with a sick wife and hungry children, and bankruptcy staring me in the face. On whose shoulders does this dreadful responsibility rest? On your lordship's!"

Second letter: "After a week's delay, you favor me, my lord, with a curt reply. I can be equally curt on my side. I indignantly deny that I or my wife have ever presumed to use your lordship's name as a means of recommendation to sitters without your permission. Some enemy has slandered us. I claim, as my right, to know the name of that enemy."

Third (and last) letter: "Another week has passed, and not a word of answer has reached me from your lordship. It matters little. I have employed the interval in making inquiries, and I have at last discovered the hostile influence which has estranged you from me. I have been, it seems, so unfortunate as to offend Lady Lydiard (how, I can not imagine); and the all-powerful influence of this noble lady is now used against the struggling artist who is united to you by the sacred ties of kindred. Be it so. I can fight my way upward, my lord, as other men have done before me. A day may yet come when the throng of carriages waiting at the door of the fashionable portrait painter will include her ladyship's vehicle, and bring me the tardy expression of her ladyship's regret. I refer you, my Lord Lydiard, to that day!"

Having read Mr. Tollmidge's formidable assertions relating to herself for the second time, Lady Lydiard's meditations came to an abrupt end. She rose, took the letters in both hands to tear them up, hesitated, and threw them back into the cabinet drawer in which she had discovered them, among other papers that had not been arranged since Lord Lydiard's death.

"The idiot!" said her ladyship, thinking of Mr. Tollmidge. "I never even heard of him in my husband's lifetime; I never even knew that he was really related to Lord Lydiard, till I found his letters. What is to be done next?"

She looked, as she put that question to herself, at an open newspaper thrown on the table, which announced the death of "that accomplished artist, Mr. Tollmidge, related, it is said, to the late well-known connoisseur, Lord Lydiard." In the next sentence the writer of the obituary notice deplored the destitute condition of Mrs. Toll-

midge and her children, "thrown helpless on the mercy of the world." Lady Lydiard stood by the table, with her eyes on those lines, and saw but too plainly the direction in which they pointed—the direction of her check-book.

Turning towards the fireplace, she rang the bell. "I can do nothing in this matter," she thought to herself, "until I know whether the report about Mrs. Tollmidge and her family is to be depended on. Has Moody come back?" she asked, when the servant appeared at the door. "Moody" (otherwise her ladyship's steward) had not come back. Lady Lydiard dismissed the subject of the artist's widow from further consideration until the steward returned, and gave her mind to a question of domestic interest which lay nearer to her heart. Her favorite dog had been ailing for some time past, and no report of him had reached her that morning. She opened a door near the fireplace, which led, through a little corridor hung with rare prints, to her own boudoir. "Isabel!" she called out, "how is Tommie?"

A fresh young voice answered from behind the curtain which closed the farther end of the corridor, "No better, my lady."

A low growl followed the fresh young voice, and added (in dog's language), "Much worse, my lady—much worse!"

Lady Lydiard closed the door again, with a compassionate sigh for Tommie, and walked slowly to and fro in her spacious drawing-room, waiting for the steward's return.

Accurately described, Lord Lydiard's widow was short and fat, and perilously near her sixtieth birthday. But it may be said, without paying a compliment, that she looked younger than her age by ten years at least. Her complexion was of that delicate pink tinge which is sometimes seen in old women with well-preserved constitutions. Her eyes (equally well-preserved) were of that hard light-blue color which wears well, and does not wash out when tried by the test of tears. Add to this her short nose, her plump cheeks that set wrinkles at defiance, her white hair dressed in stiff little curls, and, if a doll could grow old, Lady Lydiard at sixty would have been the living image of that doll, taking life easily on its journey downward to the prettiest of tombs, in a burial-ground where the myrtles and roses grew all the year round.

These being her ladyship's personal merits, impartial history must acknowledge, on the list of her defects, a total want of tact and taste in her attire. The lapse of time since Lord Lydiard's death had left her at liberty to dress as she pleased. She arranged her short, clumsy figure in colors that were far too bright for a woman of her age. Her dresses, badly chosen as to their hues, were perhaps not badly made, but were certainly badly worn. Morally, as well as phys-

cally, it must be said of Lady Lydiard that her outward side was her worst side. The anomalies of her dress were matched by the anomalies of her character. There were moments when she felt and spoke as became a lady of rank, and there were other moments when she felt and spoke as might have become the cook in the kitchen. Beneath these superficial inconsistencies the great heart, the essentially true and generous nature of the woman, only waited the sufficient occasion to assert themselves. In the trivial intercourse of society she was open to ridicule on every side of her. But when a serious emergency tried the metal of which she was really made, the people who were loudest in laughing at her stood aghast, and wondered what had become of the familiar companion of their every-day lives.

Her ladyship's promenade had lasted but a little while, when a man in black clothing presented himself noiselessly at the great door which opened on the staircase. Lady Lydiard signed to him impatiently to enter the room.

"I have been expecting you for some time, Moody," she said. "You look tired. Take a chair."

The man in black bowed respectfully, and took his seat.

CHAPTER II.

ROBERT MOODY was at this time nearly forty years of age. He was a shy, quiet, dark person, with a pale, closely shaven face, agreeably animated by large black eyes set deep in their orbits. His mouth was perhaps his best feature; he had firm, well-shaped lips, which softened on rare occasions into a particularly winning smile. The whole look of the man, in spite of his habitual reserve, declared him to be eminently trustworthy. His position in Lady Lydiard's household was in no sense of the menial sort. He acted as her almoner and secretary as well as her steward—distributed her charities, wrote her letters on business, paid her bills, engaged her servants, stocked her wine-cellar, was authorized to borrow books from her library, and was served with his meals in his own room. His parentage gave him claims to these special favors; he was by birth entitled to rank as a gentleman. His father had failed at a time of commercial panic as a country banker, had paid a good dividend, and had died in exile abroad, a broken-hearted man. Robert had tried to hold his place in the world, but adverse fortune kept him down. Undeserved disaster followed him from one employment to another, until he abandoned the struggle, bade a last farewell to the pride of other days, and accepted the position considerably and delicately offered to him in Lady Lydiard's house. He had now no

near relations living, and he had never made many friends. In the intervals of occupation he led a lonely life in his little room. It was a matter of secret wonder among the women in the servants' hall, considering his personal advantages and the opportunities which must surely have been thrown in his way, that he had never tempted fortune in the character of a married man. Robert Moody entered into no explanations on that subject. In his own sad and quiet way he continued to lead his own sad and quiet life. The women all failing, from the handsome housekeeper downward, to make the smallest impression on him, consoled themselves by prophetic visions of his future relations with the sex, and predicted vindictively that "his time would come."

"Well," said Lady Lydiard, "and what have you done?"

"Your ladyship seemed to be anxious about the dog," Moody answered, in the low tone which was habitual to him. "I went first to the veterinary surgeon. He has been called away into the country; and—"

Lady Lydiard waved away the conclusion of the sentence with her hand. "Never mind the surgeon. We must find somebody else. Where did you go next?"

"To your ladyship's lawyer. Mr. Troy wished me to say that he will have the pleasure of waiting on you—"

"Pass over the lawyer, Moody. I want to know about the painter's widow. Is it true that Mrs. Tollmidge and her family are left in helpless poverty?"

"Not quite true, my lady. I have seen the clergyman of the parish, who takes an interest in the case—"

Lady Lydiard interrupted her steward for the third time. "You have not mentioned my name?" she asked, sharply.

"Certainly not, my lady. I followed my instructions, and described you as a benevolent person in search of cases of real distress. It is quite true that Mr. Tollmidge has died, leaving nothing to his family. But the widow has a little income of seventy pounds in her own right."

"Is that enough to live on, Moody?" her ladyship asked.

"Enough, in this case, for the widow and her daughter," Moody answered. "The difficulty is to pay the few debts left standing, and to start the two sons in life. They are reported to be steady lads; and the family is much respected in the neighborhood. The clergyman proposes to get a few influential names to begin with, and to start a subscription."

"No subscription!" protested Lady Lydiard. "Mr. Tollmidge was Lord Lydiard's cousin, and Mrs. Tollmidge is related to his lordship by marriage. It would be degrading to my husband's

memory to have the begging-box sent round for his relations, no matter how distant they may be. Cousins!" exclaimed her ladyship, suddenly descending from the lofty ranges of sentiment to the low. "I hate the very name of them! A person who is near enough to me to be my relation and far enough off from me to be my sweetheart is a double-faced sort of person that I don't like. Let's get back to the widow and her sons. How much do they want?"

"A subscription of five hundred pounds, my lady, would provide for everything—if it could only be collected."

"It *shall* be collected, Moody! I will pay the subscription out of my own purse." Having asserted herself in those noble terms, she spoiled the effect of her own outburst of generosity by dropping to the sordid view of the subject in her next sentence. "Five hundred pounds is a good bit of money, though; isn't it, Moody?"

"It is indeed, my lady." Rich and generous as he knew his mistress to be, her proposal to pay the whole subscription took the steward by surprise. Lady Lydiard's quick perception instantly detected what was passing in his mind.

"You don't quite understand my position in this matter," she said. "When I read the newspaper notice of Mr. Tollmidge's death, I searched among his lordship's papers to see if they really were related. I discovered some letters from Mr. Tollmidge, which showed me that he and Lord Lydiard were cousins. One of those letters contains some very painful statements, reflecting most untruly and unjustly on my conduct—lies, in short," her ladyship burst out, losing her dignity, as usual. "Lies, Moody, for which Mr. Tollmidge deserved to be horsewhipped. I would have done it myself if his lordship had told me at the time. No matter; it's useless to dwell on the thing now," she continued, ascending again to the forms of expression which became a lady of rank. "This unhappy man has done me a gross injustice; my motives may be seriously misjudged if I appear personally in communicating with his family. If I relieve them anonymously in their present trouble, I spare them the exposure of a public subscription, and I do what I believe his lordship would have done himself if he had lived. My desk is on the other table. Bring it here, Moody, and let me return good for evil, while I'm in the humor for it."

Moody obeyed in silence. Lady Lydiard wrote a check.

"Take that to the banker's, and bring back a five-hundred-pound note," she said. "I'll enclose it to the clergyman as coming from 'an unknown friend.' And be quick about it. I am only a fallible mortal, Moody. Don't leave me time enough to take the stingy view of five hundred pounds."

Moody went out with the check. No delay was to be apprehended in obtaining the money; the banking-house was hard by, in St. James's Street. Left alone, Lady Lydiard decided on occupying her mind in the generous direction by composing her anonymous letter to the clergyman. She had just taken a sheet of note-paper from her desk when a servant appeared at the door, announcing a visitor—

"Mr. Felix Sweetsir."

CHAPTER III.

"My nephew!" Lady Lydiard exclaimed, in a tone which expressed astonishment, but certainly not pleasure as well. "How many years is it since you and I last met?" she asked, in her abruptly straightforward way, as Mr. Felix Sweetsir approached her writing-table.

The visitor was not a person easily discouraged. He took Lady Lydiard's hand, and kissed it with easy grace. A shade of irony was in his manner, agreeably relieved by a playful flash of tenderness.

"Years, my dear aunt?" he said. "Look in your glass, and you will see that time has stood still since we met last. How wonderfully well you wear! When shall we celebrate the appearance of your first wrinkle? I am too old; I shall never live to see it."

He took an easy-chair, uninvited, placed himself close at his aunt's side, and ran his eye over her ill-chosen dress with an air of satirical admiration. "How perfectly successful!" he said, with his well-bred insolence. "What a chaste gayety of color!"

"What do you want?" asked her ladyship, not in the least softened by the compliment.

"I want to pay my respects to my dear aunt," Felix answered, perfectly impenetrable to his ungracious reception, and perfectly comfortable in a spacious arm-chair.

No pen-and-ink portrait need surely be drawn of Felix Sweetsir—he is too well-known a picture in society. The little lithe man, with his bright, restless eyes, and his long iron-gray hair falling in curls to his shoulders; his airy step and his cordial manner; his uncertain age, his innumerable accomplishments, and his unbounded popularity—is he not familiar everywhere and welcome everywhere? How gratefully he receives, how prodigally he repays, the cordial appreciation of an admiring world! Every man he knows is "a charming fellow." Every woman he sees is "sweetly pretty." What picnics he gives on the banks of the Thames in the summer season! What a well-earned little income he derives from the

whist table! What an inestimable actor he is at private theatricals of all sorts (weddings included)! Did you never read Sweet-sir's novel, dashed off in the intervals of curative perspiration at a German bath? Then you don't know what brilliant fiction really is. He has never written a second work; he does everything, and only does it once. One song—the despair of professional composers. One picture—just to show how easily a gentleman can take up an art and drop it again. A really multiform man, with all the graces and all the accomplishments scintillating perpetually at his fingers' ends. If these poor pages have achieved nothing else, they have done a service to persons not in society by presenting them to Sweetsir. In his gracious company the narrative brightens; and writer and reader (catching reflected brilliancy) understand each other at last, thanks to Sweetsir.

"Well," said Lady Lydiard, "now you are here, what have you got to say for yourself? You have been abroad, of course? Where?"

"Principally at Paris, my dear aunt. The only place that is fit to live in—for this excellent reason, that the French are the only people who know how to make the most of life. One has relations and friends in England; and every now and then one returns to London—"

"When one has spent all one's money in Paris," her ladyship interposed. "That's what you were going to say, isn't it?"

Felix submitted to the interruption with his delightful good-humor.

"What a bright creature you are!" he exclaimed. "What would I not give for your flow of spirits! Yes; one does spend money in Paris, as you say. The clubs, the stock exchange, the racecourse: you try your luck here, there, and everywhere; and you lose and win, win and lose, and you haven't a dull day to complain of." He paused, his smile died away, he looked inquiringly at Lady Lydiard. "What a wonderful existence yours must be!" he resumed. "The everlasting question with your needy fellow-creatures, 'Where am I to get money?' is a question that has never passed your lips. En-viable woman!" He paused once more, surprised and puzzled this time. "What is the matter, my dear aunt? You seem to be suffering under some uneasiness."

"I am suffering under your conversation," her ladyship answered, sharply. "Money is a sore subject with me just now," she went on, with her eyes on her nephew, watching the effect of what she said. "I have spent five hundred pounds this morning with a scrape of my pen. And, only a week since, I yielded to temptation, and made an addition to my picture-gallery." She looked, as

she said those words, towards an archway at the farther end of the room, closed by curtains of purple velvet. "I really tremble when I think of what that one picture cost me before I could call it mine. A landscape by Hobbema; and the National Gallery bidding against me. Never mind!" she concluded, consoling herself, as usual, with considerations that were beneath her. "Hobbema will sell at my death for a bigger price than I gave for him—that's one comfort!" She looked again at Felix; a smile of mischievous satisfaction began to show itself in her face. "Anything wrong with your watch-chain?" she asked.

Felix, absently playing with his watch-chain, started as if his aunt had suddenly awakened him. While Lady Lydiard had been speaking his vivacity had subsided little by little, and had left him looking so serious and so old that his most intimate friend would hardly have known him again. Roused by the sudden question that had been put to him, he seemed to be casting about in his mind in search of the first excuse for his silence that might turn up. "I was wondering," he began, "why I miss something when I look round this beautiful room; something familiar, you know, that I fully expected to find here."

"Tommie?" suggested Lady Lydiard, still watching her nephew as maliciously as ever.

"That's it!" cried Felix, seizing his excuse, and rallying his spirits. "Why don't I hear Tommie snarling behind me? why don't I feel Tommie's teeth in my trousers?"

The smile vanished from Lady Lydiard's face; the tone taken by her nephew in speaking of her dog was disrespectful in the extreme. She showed him plainly that she disapproved of it. Felix went on, nevertheless, impenetrable to reproof of the silent sort. "Dear little Tommie! So delightfully fat; and such an infernal temper! I don't know whether I hate him or love him. Where is he?"

"Ill in bed," answered her ladyship, with a gravity which startled even Felix himself. "I wish to speak to you about Tommie. You know everybody. Do you know of a good dog-doctor? The person I have employed so far doesn't at all satisfy me."

"Professional person?" inquired Felix.

"Yes."

"All humbugs, my dear aunt. The worse the dog gets the bigger the bill grows, don't you see? I have got the man for you—a gentleman. Knows more about horses and dogs than all the veterinary surgeons put together. We met in the boat yesterday crossing the Channel. You know him by name, of course. Lord Rothfield's youngest son, Alfred Hardyman."

"The owner of the stud farm? The man who has bred the fa-

mous racehorses?" cried Lady Lydiard. "My dear Felix, how can I presume to trouble such a great personage about my dog?"

Felix burst into his genial laugh. "Never was modesty more wofully out of place," he rejoined. "Hardyman is dying to be presented to your ladyship. He had heard, like everybody, of the magnificent decorations of this house, and he is longing to see them. His chambers are close by, in Pall Mall. If he is at home we will have him here in five minutes. Perhaps I had better see the dog first?"

Lady Lydiard shook her head. "Isabel says he had better not be disturbed," she answered. "Isabel understands him better than anybody."

Felix lifted his lively eyebrows with a mixed expression of curiosity and surprise. "Who is Isabel?"

Lady Lydiard was vexed with herself for carelessly mentioning Isabel's name in her nephew's presence. Felix was not the sort of person whom she was desirous of admitting to her confidence in domestic matters. "Isabel is an addition to my household since you were here last," she answered, shortly.

"Young and pretty?" inquired Felix. "Ah! you look serious, and you don't answer me. Young and pretty evidently. Which may I see first, the addition to your household or the addition to your picture-gallery? You look at the picture-gallery—I am answered again." He rose to approach the archway, and stopped at his first step forward. "A sweet girl is a dreadful responsibility, aunt," he resumed, with an ironical assumption of gravity. "Do you know, I shouldn't be surprised if Isabel, in the long-run, cost you more than Hobbema. Who is this at the door?"

The person at the door was Robert Moody, returned from the bank. Mr. Felix Sweetsir, being near-sighted, was obliged to fit his eyeglass in position before he could recognize the prime-minister of Lady Lydiard's household.

"Ha! our worthy Moody. How well he wears! Not a gray hair on his head—and look at mine! What d'ye do you use, Moody? If he had my open disposition he would tell. As it is, he looks unutterable things, and holds his tongue. Ah! if I could only have held *my* tongue—when I was in the diplomatic service, you know—what a position I might have occupied by this time! Don't let me interrupt you, Moody, if you have anything to say to Lady Lydiard."

Having acknowledged Mr. Sweetsir's lively greeting by a formal bow, and a grave look of wonder which respectfully repelled that vivacious gentleman's flow of humor, Moody turned towards his mistress.

"Have you got the bank-note?" asked her ladyship.

M*

Moody laid the bank-note on the table.

"Am I in the way?" inquired Felix.

"No," said his aunt. "I have a letter to write; it won't occupy me for more than a few minutes. You can stay here, or go and look at the Hobbema, which you please."

Felix made a second sauntering attempt to reach the picture-gallery. Arrived within a few steps of the entrance, he stopped again, attracted by an open cabinet of Italian workmanship filled with rare old china. Being nothing if not a cultivated amateur, Mr. Sweetsir paused to pay his passing tribute of admiration before the contents of the cabinet. "Charming! charming!" he said to himself, with his head twisted appreciatively a little on one side. Lady Lydiard and Moody left him in undisturbed enjoyment of the china, and went on with the business of the bank-note.

"Ought we to take the number of the note, in case of accident?" asked her ladyship.

Moody produced a slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket. "I took the number, my lady, at the bank."

"Very well. You keep it. While I am writing my letter, suppose you direct the envelope. What is the clergyman's name?"

Moody mentioned the name and directed the envelope. Felix, happening to look round at Lady Lydiard and the steward while they were both engaged in writing, returned suddenly to the table as if he had been struck by a new idea.

"Is there a third pen?" he asked. "Why shouldn't I write a line at once to Hardyman, aunt? The sooner you have his opinion about Tommie, the better—don't you think so?"

Lady Lydiard pointed to the pen-tray, with a smile. To show consideration for her dog was to seize irresistibly on the high-road to her favor. Felix set to work on his letter, in a large, scrambling handwriting, with plenty of ink and a noisy pen. "I declare we are like clerks in an office," he remarked, in his cheery way. "All with our noses to the paper, writing as if we lived by it! Here Moody, let one of the servants take this at once to Mr. Hardyman's."

The messenger was despatched. Robert returned, and waited near his mistress, with the directed envelope in his hand. Felix sauntered back slowly towards the picture-gallery for the third time. In a moment more Lady Lydiard finished her letter, and folded up the bank-note in it. She had just taken the directed envelope from Moody, and had just placed the letter inside it, when a scream from the inner room, in which Isabel was nursing the sick dog, startled everybody. "My lady! my lady!" cried the girl, distractedly, "Tommie is in a fit! Tommie is dying!"

Lady Lydiard dropped the unclosed envelope on the table, and

ran—yes, short as she was and fat as she was, ran—into the inner room. The two men, left together, looked at each other.

"Moody," said Felix, in his lazy, cynical way, "do you think if you or I were in a fit that her ladyship would run? Bah! these are the things that shake one's faith in human nature. I feel infernally seedy. That cursed Channel passage—I tremble in my inmost stomach when I think of it. Get me something, Moody."

"What shall I send you, sir?" Moody asked, coldly.

"Some dry Curaçoa and a biscuit. And let it be brought to me in the picture-gallery. Damn the dog! I'll go and look at Hobbema."

This time he succeeded in reaching the archway, and disappeared behind the curtains of the picture-gallery.

CHAPTER IV.

LEFT alone in the drawing-room, Moody looked at the unfastened envelope on the table.

Considering the value of the enclosure, might he feel justified in wetting the gum and securing the envelope for safety's sake. After thinking it over, Moody decided that he was not justified in meddling with the letter. On reflection, her ladyship might have changes to make in it, or might have a postscript to add to what she had already written. Apart, too, from these considerations, was it reasonable to act as if Lady Lydiard's house was a hotel, perpetually open to the intrusion of strangers? Objects worth twice five hundred pounds in the aggregate were scattered about on the tables and in the unlocked cabinets all round him. Moody withdrew, without further hesitation, to order the light restoratives prescribed for himself by Mr. Sweetsir. The unclosed letter reposed in its place on the table.

The footman who took the Curaçoa into the picture-gallery found Felix recumbent on a sofa—to all appearance so completely absorbed in the Hobbema that he was quite unable to look at anything else.

He took the Curaçoa mechanically, drained the glass at a draught, and held it out to be filled for the second time. "Don't interrupt me," he said, peevishly, catching the servant in the act of staring at him. "Put down the bottle and go!" Forbidden to look at Mr. Sweetsir, the man's eyes, as he left the gallery, turned wonderingly towards the famous landscape. And what did he see? He saw one towering big cloud in the sky that threatened rain, two withered, mahogany-colored trees sorely in want of rain, a muddy road greatly the worse for rain, and a vagabond boy running home who was

afraid of the rain. That was the picture to the footman's eye. He took a gloomy view of the state of Mr. Sweetsir's brains on his return to the servants' hall. "A slate loose, poor devil!" That was the footman's report of the brilliant Felix.

An interval of some minutes elapsed, and at last the silence in the picture-gallery was broken by voices penetrating into it from the drawing-room. Felix rose to a sitting position on the sofa. He had recognized the voice of Alfred Hardyman saying, "Don't disturb Lady Lydiard, and the voice of Moody answering, "I will just knock at the door of her ladyship's room, sir; you will find Mr. Sweetsir in the picture-gallery."

The curtains over the archway parted, and disclosed the figure of a tall, lean man, with a closely cropped head set a little stiffly on his shoulders. The immovable gravity of face and manner which every Englishman seems to acquire who lives constantly in the society of horses, was the gravity which this gentleman displayed as he entered the picture-gallery. He was a finely made, sinewy man, with clearly cut, regular features. If he had not been affected with horses on the brain, he would doubtless have been personally popular with the women. As it was, the serene and hippic gloom of the handsome horse-breeder daunted the daughters of Eve, and they failed to make up their minds about the exact value of him, socially considered. Alfred Hardyman was, nevertheless, a remarkable man in his way. He had been offered the customary alternatives submitted to the younger sons of the nobility—the Church or the diplomatic service—and had refused the one and the other. "I like horses," he said, "and I mean to get my living out of them. Don't talk to me about my position in the world. Talk to my eldest brother, who gets the money and the title." Starting in life with these sensible views, and with a small capital of five thousand pounds, Hardyman took his own place in the sphere that was fitted for him. At the period of this narrative he was already a rich man, and one of the greatest authorities on horse-breeding in England. His prosperity made no change in him. He was always the same grave, quiet, obstinately resolute man, true to the few friends whom he admitted to his intimacy, and sincere to a fault in the expression of his feelings among persons whom he distrusted or disliked. As he entered the picture-gallery and paused for a moment looking at Felix on the sofa, his large, cold, steady gray eyes rested on the little man with an indifference that just verged on contempt. Felix, on the other hand, sprang to his feet with alert politeness, and greeted his friend with exuberant cordiality.

"Dear old boy! This is so good of you," he began. "I feel it; I do assure you I feel it!"

"You needn't trouble yourself to feel it," was the quietly ungracious answer. "Lady Lydiard brings me here. I come to see the house—and the dog." He looked round the gallery in his gravely attentive way. "I don't understand pictures," he remarked, resignedly. "I shall go back to the drawing-room."

After a moment's consideration Felix followed him into the drawing-room, with the air of a man who was determined not to be repelled.

"Well?" asked Hardyman. "What is it?"

"About that matter?" Felix said, inquiringly.

"What matter?"

"Oh, you know. Will next week do?"

"Next week *won't* do."

Mr. Felix Sweetsir cast one look at his friend. His friend was too intently occupied with the decorations of the drawing-room to notice the look.

"Will to-morrow do?" Felix resumed, after an interval.

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"Between twelve and one in the afternoon."

"Between twelve and one in the afternoon," Felix repeated. He looked again at Hardyman, and took his hat. "Make my apologies to my aunt," he said. "You must introduce yourself to her ladyship. I can't wait here any longer." He walked out of the room, having deliberately returned the contemptuous indifference of Hardyman by a similar indifference on his own side at parting.

Left by himself, Hardyman took a chair and glanced at the door which led into the boudoir. The steward had knocked at that door, had disappeared through it, and had not appeared again. How much longer was Lady Lydiard's visitor to be left unnoticed in Lady Lydiard's house?

As the question passed through his mind the boudoir door opened. For once in his life Alfred Hardyman's composure deserted him. He started to his feet, like an ordinary mortal taken completely by surprise.

Instead of Mr. Moody, instead of Lady Lydiard, there appeared in the open doorway a young woman in a state of embarrassment, who actually quickened the beat of Mr. Hardyman's heart the moment he set eyes on her. Was the person who produced this amazing impression at first sight a person of importance? Nothing of the sort. She was only "Isabel," surnamed "Miller." Even her name had nothing in it. Only "Isabel Miller!"

Had she any pretensions to distinction in virtue of her personal appearance?

It is not easy to answer the question. The women (let us put the worst judges first), had long since discovered that she wanted that indispensable elegance of figure which is derived from slimmness of waist and length of limb. The men (who were better acquainted with the subject) looked at her figure from their point of view, and finding it essentially embraceable, asked for nothing more. It might have been her bright complexion, or it might have been the bold lustre of her eyes (as the women considered it), that dazzled the lords of creation generally, and made them all alike incompetent to discover her faults. Still, she had compensating attractions which no severity of criticism could dispute. Her smile, beginning at her lips, flowed brightly, and instantly over her whole face. A delicious atmosphere of health, freshness, and good-humor seemed to radiate from her wherever she went and whatever she did. For the rest, her brown hair grew low over her broad, white forehead, and was topped by a neat little lace cap with ribbons of a violet color. A plain collar and plain cuffs encircled her smooth, round neck and her plump, dimpled hands. Her merino dress, covering but not hiding the charming outline of her bosom, matched the color of her cap ribbons, and was brightened by a white muslin apron coquetishly trimmed about the pockets, a gift from Lady Lydiard. Blushing and smiling, she let the door fall to behind her, and, shyly approaching the stranger, said to him, in her small, clear voice, "If you please, sir, are you Mr. Hardyman?"

The gravity of the great horse-breeder deserted him at her first question. He smiled as he acknowledged that he was "Mr. Hardyman"—he smiled as he offered her a chair.

"No, thank you, sir," she said, with a quaintly pretty inclination of her head. "I am only sent here to make her ladyship's apologies. She has put the poor, dear dog into a warm bath, and she can't leave him. And Mr. Moody can't come instead of me, because I was too frightened to be of any use, and so he had to hold the dog. That's all. We are very anxious, sir, to know if the warm bath is the right thing. Please come into the room and tell us."

She led the way back to the door. Hardyman, naturally enough, was slow to follow her. When a man is fascinated by the charm of youth and beauty he is in no hurry to transfer his attention to a sick animal in a bath. Hardyman seized on the first excuse that he could devise for keeping Isabel to himself—that is to say, for keeping her in the drawing-room.

"I think I shall be better able to help you," he said, "if you will tell me something about the dog first."

Even his accent in speaking had altered to a certain degree. The

quiet, dreary monotone in which he habitually spoke quickened a little under his present excitement. As for Isabel, she was too deeply interested in Tommie's welfare to suspect that she was being made the victim of a stratagem. She left the door and returned to Hardyman with eager eyes. "What can I tell you, sir?" she asked, innocently.

Hardyman pressed his advantage without mercy.

"You can tell me what sort of dog he is?"

"Yes, sir."

"How old he is?"

"Yes, sir."

"What his name is?—what his temper is?—what his illness is?—what disease his father and mother?—what—"

Isabel's head began to turn giddy. "One thing at a time, sir!" she interposed, with a gesture of entreaty. "The dog sleeps on my bed, and I had a bad night with him, he disturbed me so, and I am afraid I am very stupid this morning. His name is Tommie. We are obliged to call him by it, because he won't answer to any other than the name he had when my lady bought him. But we spell it with an 'i e' at the end, which makes it less vulgar than Tommy with a 'y.' I am very sorry, sir, I forget what else you wanted to know. Please to come in here, and my lady will tell you everything."

She tried to get back to the door of the boudoir. Hardyman, feasting his eyes on the pretty, changeable face that looked up at him with such innocent confidence in his authority, drew her away again from the door by the one means at his disposal. He returned to his questions about Tommie.

"Wait a little, please. What sort of a dog is he?"

Isabel turned back again from the door. To describe Tommie was a labor of love. "He is the most beautiful dog in the world!" the girl began, with kindling eyes. "He has the most exquisite white curly hair and two light brown patches on his back, and, oh! *such* lovely dark eyes! They call him a Scotch terrier. When he is well his appetite is truly wonderful—nothing comes amiss to him, sir, from *pâté de foie gras* to potatoes. He has his enemies, poor dear, though you wouldn't think it. People who won't put up with being bitten by him (what shocking tempers one does meet with, to be sure!) call him a mongrel. Isn't it a shame? Please come in and see him, sir; my lady will be tired of waiting."

Another journey to the door followed those words, checked instantly by a serious objection.

"Stop a minute! You must tell me what his temper is, or I can do nothing for him."

Isabel returned once more, feeling that it was really serious this

time. Her gravity was even more charming than her gayety. As she lifted her face to him, with large, solemn eyes, expressive of her sense of responsibility, Hardyman would have given every horse in his stables to have had the privilege of taking her in his arms and kissing her.

"Tommie has the temper of an angel with the people he likes," she said. "When he bites, it generally means that he objects to strangers. He loves my lady, and he loves Mr. Moody, and he loves me, and—and I think that's all. This way, sir, if you please; I am sure I heard my lady call."

"No," said Hardyman, in his immovably obstinate way. "Nobody called. About this dog's temper? Doesn't he take to any strangers? What sort of people does he bite in general?"

Isabel's pretty lips began to curl upward at the corners in a quiet smile. Hardyman's last imbecile question had opened her eyes to the true state of the case. Still, Tommie's future was in this strange gentleman's hands; she felt bound to consider that. And, moreover, it was no every-day event in Isabel's experience to fascinate a famous personage, who was also a magnificent and perfectly dressed man. She ran the risk of wasting another minute or two and went on with the memoirs of Tommie.

"I must own, sir," she resumed, "that he behaves a little ungratefully—even to strangers who take an interest in him. When he gets lost in the streets (which is very often), he sits down on the pavement and howls till he collects a pitying crowd round him; and when they try to read his name and address on his collar he snaps at them. The servants generally find him and bring him back; and as soon as he gets home he turns round on the doorstep and snaps at the servants. I think it must be his fun. You should see him sitting up in his chair at dinner-time, waiting to be helped, with his fore-paw on the edge of the table, like the hands of a gentleman at a public dinner making a speech. But, oh!" cried Isabel, checking herself, with the tears in her eyes, "how can I talk of him in this way when he is so dreadfully ill! Some of them say it's bronchitis, and some say it's his liver. Only yesterday I took him to the front door to give him a little air, and he stood still on the pavement, quite stupefied. For the first time in his life he snapped at nobody who went by; and oh, dear, he hadn't even the heart to smell a lamp-post!"

Isabel had barely stated this last afflicting circumstance when the memoirs of Tommie were suddenly cut short by the voice of Lady Lydiard—really calling this time—from the inner room.

"Isabel! Isabel!" cried her ladyship, "what are you about?"

Isabel ran to the door of the boudoir and threw it open. "Go in, sir! Pray go in!" she said.

"Without you?" Hardyman asked.

"I will follow you, sir. I have something to do for her ladyship first."

She still held the door open, and pointed entreatingly to the passage which led to the boudoir. "I shall be blamed, sir," she said, "if you don't go in."

This statement of the case left Hardyman no alternative. He presented himself to Lady Lydiard without another moment of delay.

Having closed the drawing-room door on him, Isabel waited a little, absorbed in her own thoughts.

She was now perfectly well aware of the effect which she had produced on Hardyman. Her vanity, it is not to be denied, was flattered by his admiration—he was so grand and so tall, and he had such fine large eyes. The girl looked prettier than ever as she stood with her head down and her color heightened, smiling to herself. A clock on the chimney-piece striking the half-hour roused her. She cast one look at the glass as she passed it, and went to the table at which Lady Lydiard had been writing.

Methodical Mr. Moody, in submitting to be employed as bath attendant upon Tommie, had not forgotten the interests of his mistress. He reminded her ladyship that she had left her letter, with a bank-note enclosed in it, unsealed. Absorbed in the dog, Lady Lydiard answered. "Isabel is doing nothing, let Isabel seal it. Show Mr. Hardyman in here," she continued, turning to Isabel, "and then seal a letter of mine which you will find on the table." "And when you have sealed it," careful Mr. Moody added, "put it back on the table; I will take charge of it when her ladyship has done with me."

Such were the special instructions which now detained Isabel in the drawing-room. She lit the taper, and closed and sealed the open envelope, without feeling curiosity enough even to look at the address. Mr. Hardyman was the uppermost subject in her thoughts. Leaving the sealed letter on the table, she returned to the fireplace, and studied her own charming face attentively in the looking-glass. The time passed, and Isabel's reflection was still the subject of Isabel's contemplation. "He must see many beautiful ladies," she thought, veering backward and forward between pride and humility. "I wonder what he sees in me?"

The clock struck the hour. Almost at the same moment the boudoir door opened, and Robert Moody, released at last from attendance on Tommie, entered the drawing-room.

CHAPTER V.

"WELL," asked Isabel, eagerly, "what does Mr. Hardyman say? Does he think he can cure Tommie?"

Moody answered a little coldly and stiffly. His dark, deeply set eyes rested on Isabel with an uneasy look.

"Mr. Hardyman seems to understand animals," he said. "He lifted the dog's eyelid and looked at his eye, and then he told us the bath was useless."

"Go on," said Isabel, impatiently. "He did something, I suppose, besides telling you that the bath was useless."

"He took a knife out of his pocket, with a lancet in it."

Isabel clasped her hands with a faint cry of horror. "Oh, Mr. Moody, did he hurt Tommie?"

"Hurt him?" Moody repeated, indignant at the interest which she felt in the animal and the indifference which she exhibited towards the man (as represented by himself.) "Hurt him, indeed! Mr. Hardyman bled the brute—"

"Brute?" Isabel reiterated, with flashing eyes. "I know some people, Mr. Moody, who really deserve to be called by that horrid word. If you can't say 'Tommie,' when you speak of him in my presence, be so good as to say 'the dog.'"

Moody yielded with the worst possible grace. "Oh, very well! Mr. Hardyman bled the dog, and brought him to his senses directly. I am charged to tell you—" He stopped as if the message which he was instructed to deliver was in the last degree distasteful to him.

"Well, what were you charged to tell me?"

"I was to say that Mr. Hardyman will give you instructions how to treat the dog for the future."

Isabel hastened to the door, eager to receive her instructions. Moody stopped her before she could open it.

"You are in a great hurry to get to Mr. Hardyman," he remarked.

Isabel looked back at him in surprise. "You said just now that Mr. Hardyman was waiting to tell me how to nurse Tommie."

"Let him wait," Moody rejoined, sternly. "When I left him,

he was sufficiently occupied in expressing his favorable opinion of you to her ladyship."

The steward's pale face turned paler still as he said those words. With the arrival of Isabel in Lady Lydiard's house "his time had come"—exactly as the women in the servants' hall had predicted. At last the impenetrable man felt the influence of the sex; at last he knew the passion of love—misplaced, ill-starred, hopeless love, for a woman who was young enough to be his child. He had already spoken to Isabel more than once in terms which told his secret plainly enough. But the smouldering fire of jealousy in the man, fanned into flame by Hardyman, now showed itself for the first time. His looks, even more than his words, would have warned a woman with any knowledge of the natures of men to be careful how she answered him. Young, giddy, and inexperienced, Isabel followed the flippant impulse of the moment, without a thought of the consequences. "I'm sure it's very kind of Mr. Hardyman to speak favorably of me," she said, with a pert little laugh. "I hope you are not jealous of him, Mr. Moody?"

Moody was in no humor to make allowances for the unbridled gayety of youth and good spirits. "I hate any man who admires you," he burst out, passionately, "let him be who he may!"

Isabel looked at her strange lover with unaffected astonishment. How unlike Mr. Hardyman, who had treated her as a lady from first to last. "What an odd man you are!" she said. "You can't take a joke. I'm sure I didn't mean to offend you."

"You don't offend me—you do worse, you distress me."

Isabel's color began to rise. The merriment died out of her face; she looked at Moody gravely. "I don't like to be accused of distressing people when I don't deserve it," she said. "I had better leave you. Let me by, if you please."

Having committed one error in offending her, Moody committed another in attempting to make his peace with her. Acting under the fear that she would really leave him, he took her roughly by the arm.

"You are always trying to get away from me," he said. "I wish I knew how to make you like me, Isabel."

"I don't allow you to call me Isabel!" she retorted, struggling to free herself from his hold. "Let go of my arm. You hurt me."

Moody dropped her arm with a bitter sigh. "I don't know how to deal with you," he said, simply. "Have some pity on me!"

If the steward had known anything of women (at Isabel's age) he would never have appealed to her merey in those plain terms and at that unpropitious moment. "Pity you?" she repeated contemptuously. "Is that all you have to say to me after hurting my arm?"

"What a bear you are!" She shrugged her shoulders and put her hands coquettishly into the pockets of her apron. That was how she pitied him! His face turned paler and paler—he writhed under it.

"For God's sake, don't turn everything I say to you into ridicule!" he cried. "You know I love you with all my heart and soul. Again and again I have asked you to be my wife, and you laugh at me as if it was a joke. I haven't deserved to be treated in that cruel way. It maddens me—I can't endure it!"

Isabel looked down at the floor, and followed the lines in the pattern of the carpet with the end of her smart little shoe. She could hardly have been farther away from really understanding Moody if he had spoken in Hebrew. She was partly startled, partly puzzled, by the strong emotions which she had unconsciously called into being. "Oh, dear me!" she said, "why can't you talk of something else? why can't we be friends? Excuse me for mentioning it," she went on, looking up at him with a saucy smile, "you are old enough to be my father."

Moody's head sank on his breast. "I own it," he answered, humbly. "But there is something to be said for me. Men as old as I am have made good husbands before now. I would devote my whole life to make you happy. There isn't a wish you could form which I wouldn't be proud to obey. You mustn't reckon me by years. My youth has not been wasted in a profligate life. I can be truer to you and fonder of you than many a younger man. Surely my heart is not quite unworthy of you, when it is all yours. I have lived such a lonely, miserable life; and you might so easily brighten it! You are kind to everybody else, Isabel. Tell me, dear, why are you so hard on me?"

His voice trembled as he appealed to her in those simple words. He had taken the right way at last to produce an impression on her. She really felt for him. All that was true and tender in her nature began to rise in her and take his part. Unhappily, he felt too deeply and too strongly to be patient, and to give her time. He completely misinterpreted her silence—completely mistook the motive that made her turn aside for a moment to gather composure enough to speak to him. "Ah!" he burst out, bitterly, turning away on his side, "you have no heart!"

She instantly resented those unjust words. At that moment they wounded her to the quick.

"You know best," she said. "I have no doubt you are right. Remember one thing, however, though I have no heart, I have never encouraged you, Mr. Moody. I have declared over and over again that I could only be your friend. Understand that for the future,

"If you please. There are plenty of nice women who will be glad to marry you, I have no doubt. You will always have my best wishes for your welfare. Good-morning. Her ladyship will wonder what has become of me. Be so kind as to let me pass."

Tortured by the passion that consumed him, Moody obstinately kept his place between Isabel and the door. The unworthy suspicion of her, which had been in his mind all through the interview, now forced its way outward to expression at last.

"No woman ever used a man as you use me without some reason for it," he said. "You have kept your secret wonderfully well; but, sooner or later, all secrets get found out. I know what is in your mind as well as you know it yourself. You are in love with some other man."

Isabel's face flushed deeply; the defensive pride of her sex was up in arms in an instant. She cast one disdainful look at Moody, without troubling herself to express her contempt in words. "Stand out of my way, sir!" that was all she said to him.

"You are in love with some other man," he reiterated, passionately. "Deny it if you can!"

"Deny it?" she repeated, with flashing eyes. "What right have you to ask the question? Am I not free to do as I please?"

He stood looking at her, meditating his next words, with a sudden and sinister change to self-restraint. Suppressed rage was in his rigidly set eyes, suppressed rage was in his trembling hand as he raised it emphatically while he spoke his next words.

"I have one thing more to say," he answered, "and then I have done. If I am not your husband, no other man shall be. Look well to it, Isabel Miller. If there is another man between us, I can tell him this—he shall find it no easy matter to rob me of you!"

She started, and turned pale; but it was only for a moment. The high spirit that was in her rose brightly in her eyes, and faced him without shrinking.

"Threats?" she said, with quiet contempt. "When you make love, Mr. Moody, you take strange ways of doing it. My conscience is easy. You may try to frighten me, but you will not succeed. When you have recovered your temper I will accept your excuses." She paused, and pointed to the table. "There is the letter that you told me to leave for you when I had sealed it," she went on. "I suppose you have her ladyship's orders. Isn't it time you began to think of obeying them?"

The contemptuous composure of her tone and manner seemed to act on Moody with crushing effect. Without a word of answer the unfortunate steward took up the letter from the table. Without a word of answer he walked mechanically to the great door which

opened on the staircase, turned on the threshold to look at Isabel, waited a moment, pale and still, and suddenly left the room.

That silent departure, that hopeless submission, impressed Isabel in spite of herself. The sustaining sense of injury and insult sank, as it were, from under her the moment she was alone. He had not been gone a minute before she began to be sorry for him once more. The interview had taught her nothing. She was neither old enough nor experienced enough to understand the overwhelming revolution produced in a man's character when he feels the passion of love for the first time in the maturity of his life. If Moody had stolen a kiss at the first opportunity, she would have resented the liberty that he had taken with her; but she would have thoroughly understood him. His terrible earnestness, his overpowering agitation, his abrupt violence—all these evidences of a passion that was a mystery to himself—simply puzzled her. "I'm sure I didn't wish to hurt his feelings" (such was the form that her reflections took in her present penitent frame of mind); "but why did he provoke me? It is a shame to tell me that I love some other man, when there is no other man. I declare I begin to hate the men, if they are all like Mr. Moody. I wonder whether he will forgive me when he sees me again? I'm sure I'm willing to forget and forgive on my side, especially if he won't insist on my being fond of him because he is fond of me. Oh dear! I wish he would come back and shake hands. It's enough to try the patience of a saint to be treated in this way. I wish I was ugly! The ugly ones have a quiet time of it—the men let them be. Mr. Moody! Mr. Moody!" She went out to the landing and called to him softly. There was no answer. He was no longer in the house. She stood still for a moment in silent vexation. "I'll go to Tommie," she decided. "I'm sure he's the most agreeable company of the two. And—oh, good gracious!—there's Mr. Hardyman waiting to give me my instructions! How do I look, I wonder?"

She consulted the glass once more, gave one or two corrective touches to her hair and cap, and hastened into the boudoir.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR a quarter of an hour the drawing-room remained empty. At the end of that time the council in the boudoir broke up. Lady Lydiard led the way back to the drawing-room, followed by Hardyman, Isabel being left to look after the dog. Before the door closed behind him, Hardyman turned round to reiterate his last medical directions, or, in plainer words, to take a last look at Isabel.

"Plenty of water, Miss Isabel, for the dog to lap, and a little bread

or biscuit if he wants something to eat. Nothing more, if you please, till I see him to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir. I will take the greatest care—"

At that point Lady Lydiard cut short the interchange of instructions and civilities. "Shut the door, if you please, Mr. Hardyman. I feel the draught. Many thanks! I am really at a loss to tell you how gratefully I feel your kindness. But for you my poor little dog might have been dead by this time."

Hardyman answered, in the quiet, melancholy monotone which was habitual with him, "Your ladyship need feel no further anxiety about the dog. Only be careful not to overfeed him. He will do very well under Miss Isabel's care. By-the-bye, her family name is Miller, is it not? Is she related to the Warwickshire Millers, of Duxborough House?"

Lady Lydiard looked at him with an expression of satirical surprise. "Mr. Hardyman," she said, "this makes the fourth time you have questioned me about Isabel. You seem to take a great interest in my little companion. Don't make any apologies, pray. You pay Isabel a compliment; and as I am very fond of her, I am naturally gratified when I find her admired. At the same time," she added, with one of her abrupt transitions of language, "I had my eye on you and I had my eye on her when you were talking in the next room, and I don't mean to let you make a fool of the girl. She is not in your line of life, and the sooner you know it the better. You make me laugh when you ask if she is related to gentlefolks. She is the orphan daughter of a chemist in the country. Her relations haven't a penny to bless themselves with, except an old aunt, who lives in a village on two or three hundred a year. I heard of the girl by accident. When she lost her father and mother, her aunt offered to take her. Isabel said, 'No, thank you; I will not be a burden on a relation who has only enough for herself. A girl can earn an honest living if she tries, and I mean to try'—that's what she said. I admired her independence," her ladyship proceeded, ascending again to the higher regions of thought and expression. "My niece's marriage, just at that time, had left me alone in this great house. I proposed to Isabel to come to me as companion and reader for a few weeks, and to decide for herself whether she liked the life or not. We have never been separated since that time. I could hardly be fonder of her if she were my own daughter, and she returns my affection with all her heart. She has excellent qualities—prudent, cheerful, sweet-tempered; with good sense enough to understand what her place is in the world, as distinguished from her place in my regard. I have taken care, for her own sake, never to leave that part of the question in any doubt. It would be cruel

kindness to deceive her as to her future position when she marries. I shall take good care that the man who pays his addresses to her is a man in her rank of life. I know but too well, in the case of one of my own relatives, what miseries unequal marriages bring with them. Excuse me for troubling you at this length on domestic matters. I am very fond of Isabel, and a girl's head is so easily turned. Now you know what her position really is, you will also know what limits there must be to the expression of your interest in her. I am sure we understand each other; and I say no more."

Hardyman listened to this long harangue with the immovable gravity which was part of his character—except when Isabel had taken him by surprise. When her ladyship gave him the opportunity of speaking on his side he had very little to say, and that little did not suggest that he had greatly profited by what he had heard. His mind had been full of Isabel when Lady Lydiard began, and it remained just as full of her, in just the same way, when Lady Lydiard had done.

"Yes," he remarked, quietly, "Miss Isabel is an uncommonly nice girl, as you say. Very pretty, and such frank, unaffected manners. I don't deny that I feel an interest in her. The young ladies one meets in society are not much to my taste. Miss Isabel is my taste."

Lady Lydiard's face assumed a look of blank dismay. "I am afraid I have failed to convey my exact meaning to you," she said.

Hardyman gravely declared that he understood her perfectly. "Perfectly," he repeated, with his impenetrable obstinacy. "Your ladyship exactly expresses my opinion of Miss Isabel. Prudent and cheerful and sweet-tempered, as you say—all the qualities in a woman that I admire. With good looks, too—of course with good looks. She will be a perfect treasure (as you remarked just now) to the man who marries her. I may claim to know something about it. I have twice narrowly escaped being married myself; and though I can't exactly explain it, I'm all the harder to please in consequence. Miss Isabel pleases me. I think I have said that before. Pardon me for saying it again. I'll call to-morrow morning and look at the dog, as early as eleven o'clock, if you will allow me. Later in the day I must be off to France to attend a sale of horses. Glad to have been of any use to your ladyship, I am sure. Good-morning."

Lady Lydiard let him go, wisely resigning any further attempt to establish an understanding between her visitor and herself.

"He is either a person of very limited intelligence when he is away from his stables," she thought, "or he deliberately declines to take a plain hint when it is given to him. I can't drop his acquaintance, on Tommie's account. The only other alternative is to keep Isabel out of his way. My good little girl shall not drift into a false

position while I am living to look after her. When Mr. Hardyman calls to-morrow, she shall be out on an errand. When he calls on his return, she shall be up-stairs with a headache. And if he tries it again, she shall be away at my house in the country. If he makes any remarks on her absence—well, he will find that I can be just as dull of understanding as he is when the occasion calls for it.”

Having arrived at this satisfactory solution of the difficulty, Lady Lydiard became conscious of an irresistible impulse to summon Isabel to her presence and caress her. In the nature of a warm-hearted woman, this was only the inevitable reaction which followed the subsidence of anxiety about the girl, after her own resolution had set that anxiety at rest. She threw open the door and made one of her sudden appearances in the boudoir. Even in the fervent outpouring of her affection there was still the inherent abruptness of manner which so strongly marked Lady Lydiard's character in all the relations of life.

“Did I give you a kiss this morning?” she asked, when Isabel rose to receive her.

“Yes, my lady,” said the girl, with her charming smile.

“Come, then, and give me a kiss in return. Do you love me? Very well, then, treat me like your mother. Never mind ‘my lady’ this time. Give me a good hug.”

Something in those homely words, or something perhaps in the look that accompanied them, touched sympathies in Isabel which seldom showed themselves on the surface. Her smiling lips trembled, the bright tears rose in her eyes. “You are too good to me,” she murmured, with her head on Lady Lydiard's bosom. “How can I ever love you enough in return?”

Lady Lydiard patted the pretty head that rested on her with such filial tenderness. “There! there!” she said. “Go back and play with Tommie, my dear. We may be as fond of each other as we like, but we mustn't cry. God bless you! Go away!—go away!”

She turned aside quickly; her own eyes were moistening, and it was part of her character to be reluctant to let Isabel see it. “Why have I made a fool of myself?” she wondered, as she approached the drawing-room door. “It doesn't matter. I am all the better for it. Odd, that Mr. Hardyman should have made me feel fonder of Isabel than ever!”

With these reflections she re-entered the drawing-room, and suddenly checked herself with a start. “Good heavens!” she exclaimed, irritably, “how you frightened me! Why was I not told you were here?”

Having left the drawing-room in a state of solitude, Lady Lydiard, on her return, found herself suddenly confronted with a gentleman

mysteriously planted on the hearthrug in her absence. The new visitor may be rightly described as a gray man. He had gray hair, eyebrows, and whiskers; he wore a gray coat, waistcoat, and trousers, and gray gloves. For the rest, his appearance was eminently suggestive of wealth and respectability, and in this case appearances were really to be trusted. The gray man was no other than Lady Lydiard's legal adviser, Mr. Troy.

"I regret, my lady, that I should have been so unfortunate as to startle you," he said, with a certain underlying embarrassment in his manner. "I had the honor of sending word by Mr. Moody that I would call at this hour, on some matters of business connected with your ladyship's house property. I presumed that you expected to find me here, waiting your pleasure—"

Thus far Lady Lydiard had listened to her legal adviser, fixing her eyes on his face in her usually frank, straightforward way. She now stopped him in the middle of a sentence, with a change of expression on her own face, which was undisguisedly a change to alarm.

"Don't apologize, Mr. Troy," she said "I am to blame for forgetting your appointment, and for not keeping my nerves under proper control." She paused for a moment, and took a seat before she said her next words. "May I ask," she resumed, "if there is something unpleasant in the business that brings you here?"

"Nothing whatever, my lady, mere formalities, which can wait till to-morrow or next day, if you wish it."

Lady Lydiard's fingers drummed impatiently on the table. "You have known me long enough, Mr. Troy, to know that I cannot endure suspense. You *have* something unpleasant to tell me."

The lawyer respectfully remonstrated. "Really, Lady Lydiard," he began.

"It won't do, Mr. Troy. I know how you look at me on ordinary occasions, and I see how you look at me now. You are a very clever lawyer; but, happily for the interests that I commit to your charge, you are also a thoroughly honest man. After twenty years' experience of you, you can't deceive *me*. You bring me bad news. Speak at once, sir, and speak plainly."

Mr. Troy yielded, inch by inch, as it were "I bring news which, I fear, may annoy your ladyship." He paused, and advanced another inch. "It is news which I only became acquainted with myself on entering this house." He waited again, and made another advance. "I happened to meet your ladyship's steward, Mr. Moody, in the hall—"

"Where is he?" Lady Lydiard interposed, angrily. "I can make *him* speak out, and I will. Send him here instantly."

The lawyer made a last effort to hold off the coming disclosure, a

little longer. "Mr. Moody will be here directly," he said. "Mr. Moody requested me to prepare your ladyship—"

"Will you ring the bell, Mr. Troy, or must I?"

Moody had evidently been waiting outside while the lawyer spoke for him. He saved Mr. Troy the trouble of ringing the bell by presenting himself in the drawing-room. Lady Lydiard's eyes searched his face as he approached. Her bright complexion faded suddenly. Not a word more passed her lips. She looked and waited.

In silence on his side, Moody laid an open sheet of paper on the table. The paper quivered in his trembling hand.

Lady Lydiard recovered herself first. "Is that for me?" she asked.

"Yes, my lady."

She took up the paper without an instant's hesitation. Both the men watched her anxiously as she read it.

The handwriting was strange to her. The words were these:

"I hereby certify that the bearer of these lines, Robert Moody by name, has presented to me the letter with which he was charged, addressed to myself, with the seal intact. I regret to add that there is, to say the least of it, some mistake. The enclosure referred to by the anonymous writer of the letter, who signs 'A Friend in Need,' has not reached me. No five-hundred-pound bank-note was in the letter when I opened it. My wife was present when I broke the seal, and can certify to this statement if necessary. Not knowing who my charitable correspondent is (Mr. Moody being forbidden to give me any information), I can only take this means of stating the case exactly as it stands, and hold myself at the disposal of the writer of the letter. My private address is at the head of the page.

"SAMUEL BRADSTOCK,

"Rector St. Anne's, Deansbury, London."

Lady Lydiard dropped the paper on the table. For the moment, plainly as the rector's statement was expressed, she appeared to be incapable of understanding it. "What, in God's name, does this mean?" she asked.

The lawyer and the steward looked at each other. Which of the two was entitled to speak first? Lady Lydiard gave them no time to decide. "Moody," she said, sternly, "you took charge of the letter; I look to you for an explanation."

Moody's dark eyes flashed. He answered Lady Lydiard, without caring to conceal that he resented the tone in which she had spoken to him.

"I undertook to deliver the letter at its address," he said. "I found it, sealed, on the table. Your ladyship has the clergyman's

written testimony that I handed it to him with the seal unbroken. I have done my duty, and I have no explanation to offer."

Before Lady Lydiard could speak again, Mr. Troy discreetly interfered. He saw plainly that his experience was required to lead the investigation in the right direction.

"Pardon me, my lady," he said, with that happy mixture of the positive and the polite in his manner of which lawyers alone possess the secret. "There is only one way of arriving at the truth in painful matters of this sort. We must begin at the beginning. May I venture to ask your ladyship a question?"

Lady Lydiard felt the composing influence of Mr. Troy. "I am at your disposal, sir," she said, quietly.

"Are you absolutely certain that you enclosed the bank-note in the letter?" the lawyer asked.

"I certainly believe I enclosed it," Lady Lydiard answered. "But I was so alarmed at the time by the sudden illness of my dog that I do not feel justified in speaking positively."

"Was anybody in the room with your ladyship when you put the enclosure in the letter, as you believe?"

"I was in the room," said Moody. "I can swear that I saw her ladyship put the bank-note in the letter, and the letter in the envelope."

"And seal the envelope?" asked Mr. Troy.

"No, sir. Her ladyship was called away into the next room to the dog before she could seal the envelope."

Mr. Troy addressed himself once more to Lady Lydiard. "Did your ladyship take the letter into the next room with you?"

"I was too much alarmed to think of it, Mr. Troy. I left it here on the table."

"With the envelope open?"

"Yes."

"How long were you absent in the other room?"

"Half an hour or more."

"Ha!" said Mr. Troy to himself, "this complicates it a little." He reflected for a while, and then turned again to Moody. "Did any of the servants know of this bank-note being in her ladyship's possession?"

"Not one of them," Moody answered.

"Do you suspect any of the servants?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Are there any workmen employed in the house?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know of any persons who had access to the room while Lady Lydiard was absent from it?"

"Two visitors called, sir."

"Who were they?"

"Her ladyship's nephew, Mr. Felix Sweetsir, and the Honorable Alfred Hardyman."

Mr. Troy shook his head irritably. "I am not speaking of gentlemen of high position and repute," he said. "It's absurd even to mention Mr. Sweetsir and Mr. Hardyman. My question related to strangers who might have obtained access to the drawing-room—people calling, with her ladyship's sanction, for subscriptions, for instance; or people calling with articles of dress or ornament to be submitted to her ladyship's inspection."

"No such persons came to the house, to my knowledge," Moody answered.

Mr. Troy suspended the investigation, and took a turn thoughtfully in the room. The theory on which his inquiries had proceeded thus far had failed to produce any results. His experience warned him to waste no more time on it, and to return to the starting-point of the investigation—in other words, to the letter. Shifting his point of view, he turned again to Lady Lydiard, and tried his questions in a new direction.

"Mr. Moody mentioned just now," he said, "that your ladyship was called into the next room before you could seal your letter. On your return to this room, did you seal the letter?"

"I was busy with the dog," Lady Lydiard answered. "Isabel Miller was of no use in the boudoir, and I told her to seal it for me."

Mr. Troy started. The new direction in which he was pushing his inquiries began to look like the right direction already. "Miss Isabel Miller," he proceeded, "has been a resident under your ladyship's roof for some little time, I believe?"

"For nearly two years, Mr. Troy."

"As your ladyship's companion and reader?"

"As my adopted daughter," her ladyship answered, with marked emphasis.

Wise Mr. Troy rightly interpreted the emphasis as a warning to him to suspend the examination of her ladyship, and to address to Mr. Moody the far more serious questions which were now to come.

"Did any one give you the letter before you left the house with it," he said to the steward, "or did you take it yourself?"

"I took it myself, from the table here."

"Was it sealed?"

"Yes."

"Was anybody present when you took the letter from the table?"

"Miss Isabel was present."

"Did you find her alone in the room?"

"Yes, sir."

Lady Lydiard opened her lips to speak, and checked herself. Mr. Troy, having cleared the ground before him, put the fatal question.

"Mr. Moody," he said, "when Miss Isabel was instructed to seal the letter, did she know that a bank-note was enclosed in it?"

Instead of replying, Robert drew back from the lawyer with a look of horror. Lady Lydiard started to her feet, and checked herself again on the point of speaking.

"Answer him, Moody," she said, putting a strong constraint on herself.

Robert answered very unwillingly. "I took the liberty of reminding her ladyship that she had left her letter unsealed," he said. "And I mentioned as my excuse for speaking"—he stopped and corrected himself—"I *believe* I mentioned that a valuable enclosure was in the letter."

"You believe?" Mr. Troy repeated. "Can't you speak more positively than that?"

"I can speak positively," said Lady Lydiard, with her eyes on the lawyer. "Moody did mention the enclosure in the letter, in Isabel Miller's hearing as well as in mine." She paused, steadily controlling herself. "And what of that, Mr. Troy?" she added, very quietly and firmly.

Mr. Troy answered quietly and firmly on his side. "I am surprised that your ladyship should ask the question," he said.

"I persist in repeating the question," Lady Lydiard rejoined. "I say that Isabel Miller knew of the enclosure in my letter, and I ask, What of that?"

"And I answer," retorted the impenetrable lawyer, "that the suspicion of theft rests on your ladyship's adopted daughter, and on nobody else."

"It's false!" cried Robert, with a burst of honest indignation. "I wish to God I had never said a word to you about the loss of the bank-note! Oh, my lady! my lady! don't let him distress you! What does *he* know about it?"

"Hush!" said Lady Lydiard. "Control yourself, and hear what he has to say." She rested her hand on Moody's shoulder, partly to encourage him, partly to support herself, and fixing her eyes again on Mr. Troy, repeated his last words, "'Suspicion rests on my adopted daughter, and on nobody else.' Why on nobody else?"

"Is your ladyship prepared to suspect the rector of St. Anne's of embezzlement, or your own relatives and equals of theft?" Mr. Troy

asked. "Does a shadow of doubt rest on the servants? Not if Mr. Moody's evidence is to be believed. Who, to our own certain knowledge, had access to the letter while it was unsealed? Who was alone in the room with it? And who knew of the enclosure in it? I leave the answer to your ladyship."

"Isabel Miller is as incapable of an act of theft as I am. There is my answer, Mr. Troy!"

The lawyer bowed resignedly, and advanced to the door.

"Am I to take your ladyship's generous assertion as finally disposing of the question of the lost bank-note?" he inquired.

Lady Lydiard met the challenge without shrinking from it.

"No!" she said. "The loss of the bank-note is known out of my house. Other persons may suspect this innocent girl as you suspect her. It is due to Isabel's reputation—her unstained reputation, Mr. Troy—that she should know what has happened, and should have an opportunity of defending herself. She is in the next room, Moody. Bring her here."

Robert's courage failed him: he trembled at the bare idea of exposing Isabel to the terrible ordeal that awaited her. "Oh, my lady!" he pleaded, "think again before you tell the poor girl that she is suspected of theft. Keep it a secret from her; the shame of it will break her heart."

"Keep it a secret," said Lady Lydiard, "when the rector and the rector's wife both know of it! Do you think they will let the matter rest where it is, even if I could consent to hush it up? I must write to them, and I can't write anonymously after what has happened. Put yourself in Isabel's place, and tell me if you would thank the person who knew you to be innocently exposed to a disgraceful suspicion, and who concealed it from you? Go, Moody! The longer you delay, the harder it will be."

With his head sunk on his breast, with anguish written in every line of his face, Moody obeyed. Passing slowly down the short passage which connected the two rooms, and still shrinking from the duty that had been imposed on him, he paused, looking through the curtains which hung over the entrance to the boudoir.

CHAPTER VII.

THE sight that met Moody's view wrung him to the heart.

Isabel and the dog were at play together. Among the varied accomplishments possessed by Tommie, the capacity to take his part at a game of hide-and-seek was one. His playfellow for the time being put a shawl or a handkerchief over his head, so as to prevent him from seeing, and then hid among the furniture a pocket-book,

or a cigar-case, or a purse, or anything else that happened to be at hand, leaving the dog to find it, with his keen sense of smell to guide him. Doubly relieved by the fit and the bleeding, Tommie's spirits had revived; and he and Isabel had just begun their game when Moody looked into the room, charged with his terrible errand.

"You're burning, Tommie, you're burning!" cried the girl, laughing and clapping her hands. The next moment she happened to look round, and saw Moody through the parted curtains. His face warned her instantly that something serious had happened. She advanced a few steps, her eyes resting on him in silent alarm. He was himself too painfully agitated to speak. Not a word was exchanged between Lady Lydiard and Mr. Troy in the next room. In the complete stillness that prevailed the dog was heard sniffing and fidgeting about the furniture. Robert took Isabel by the hand and led her into the drawing-room. "For God's sake, spare her, my lady!" he whispered. The lawyer heard him.

"No," said Mr. Troy. "Be merciful, and tell her the truth."

He spoke to a woman who stood in no need of his advice. The inherent nobility in Lady Lydiard's nature was roused; her great heart offered itself patiently to any sorrow, to any sacrifice.

Putting her arm round Isabel—half caressing her, half supporting her—Lady Lydiard accepted the whole responsibility and told the whole truth.

Reeling under the first shock, the poor girl recovered herself with admirable courage. She raised her head and eyed the lawyer without uttering a word. In its artless consciousness of innocence the look was nothing less than sublime. Addressing herself to Mr. Troy, Lady Lydiard pointed to Isabel. "Do you see guilt there?" she asked.

Mr. Troy made no answer. In the melancholy experience of humanity to which his profession condemned him, he had seen conscious guilt assume the face of innocence, and helpless innocence admit the disguise of guilt; the keenest observation in either case failing completely to detect the truth. Lady Lydiard misinterpreted his silence as expressing the sullen self-assertion of a heartless man. She turned from him in contempt, and held out her hand to Isabel.

"Mr. Troy is not satisfied yet," she said, bitterly. "My love, take my hand, and look me in the face as your equal: I know no difference of rank at such a time as this. Before God, who hears you, are you innocent of the theft of the bank-note?"

"Before God, who hears me," Isabel answered, "I am innocent."

Lady Lydiard looked once more at the lawyer, and waited to hear if he believed *that*.

Mr. Troy took refuge in dumb diplomacy—he made a low bow.

It might have meant that he believed Isabel, or it might have meant that he modestly withdrew his own opinion into the background. Lady Lydiard did not condescend to inquire what it meant.

"The sooner we bring this painful scene to an end the better," she said. "I shall be glad to avail myself of your professional assistance, Mr. Troy, within certain limits. Outside of my house, I beg that you will spare no trouble in tracing the lost money to the person who has really stolen it. Inside of my house, I must positively request that the disappearance of the note may never be alluded to, in any way whatever, until your inquiries have been successful in discovering the thief. In the meanwhile Mrs. Tollmidge and her family must not be sufferers by my loss; I shall pay the money again." She paused, and pressed Isabel's hand with affectionate fervor. "My child," she said, "one last word to you, and I have done. You remain here, with my trust in you and my love for you absolutely unshaken. You are dearer to me than ever. Never forget that."

Isabel bent her head, and kissed the kind hand that still held hers. The high spirit that was in her, inspired by Lady Lydiard's example, rose equal to the dreadful situation in which she was placed.

"No, my lady," she said, calmly and sadly, "it cannot be. What this gentleman has said of me is not to be denied—the appearances are against me. The letter was open, and I was alone in the room with it, and Mr. Moody told me that a valuable enclosure was inside it. Dear and kind mistress, I am not fit to be a member of your household, I am not worthy to live with the honest people who serve you, while my innocence is in doubt. It is enough for me now that *you* don't doubt it. I can wait patiently, after that, for the day that gives me back my good name. Oh, my lady, don't cry about it! Pray, pray, don't cry!"

Lady Lydiard's self-control failed her for the first time. Isabel's courage had made Isabel dearer to her than ever. She sank into a chair, and covered her face with her handkerchief. Mr. Troy turned aside abruptly, and examined a Japanese vase, without any idea in his mind of what he was looking at. Lady Lydiard had gravely misjudged him in believing him to be a heartless man.

Isabel followed the lawyer, and touched him gently on the arm to rouse his attention.

"I have one relation living, sir—an aunt—who will receive me if I go to her," she said, simply. "Is there any harm in my going? Lady Lydiard will give you the address when you want me. Spare her ladyship, sir, all the pain and trouble that you can."

At last the heart that was in Mr. Troy asserted itself. "You are a fine creature!" he said, with a burst of enthusiasm. "I agree with

Lady Lydiard; I believe you are innocent, too; and I will leave no effort untried to find the proof of it." He turned aside again, and had another look at the Japanese vase.

As the lawyer withdrew himself from observation, Moody ap proached Isabel.

Thus far he had stood apart, watching her and listening to her in silence. Not a look that had crossed her face, not a word that had fallen from her, had escaped him. Unconsciously on her side, unconsciously on his side, she now wrought on his nature with a purifying and ennobling influence which animated it with a new life. All that had been selfish and violent in his passion for her left him to return no more. The immeasurable devotion which he laid at her feet in the days that were yet to come—the unyielding courage which cheerfully accepted the sacrifice of himself when events demanded it at a later period of his life—struck root in him now. Without attempting to conceal the tears that were falling fast over his cheeks, striving vainly to express those new thoughts in him that were beyond the reach of words, he stood before her the truest friend and servant that ever woman had. "Oh, my dear! my heart is heavy for you. Take me to serve you and help you. Her ladyship's kindness will permit it, I am sure."

He could say no more. In those simple words the cry of his heart reached her. "Forgive me, Robert," she answered, gratefully, "if I said anything to pain you when we spoke together a little while since. I didn't mean it." She gave him her hand, and looked timidly over her shoulder at Lady Lydiard. "Let me go!" she said, in low, broken tones; "let me go!"

Mr. Troy heard her, and stepped forward to interfere before Lady Lydiard could speak. The man had recovered his self-control; the lawyer took his place again on the scene.

"You must not leave us, my dear," he said to Isabel, "until I have put a question to Mr. Moody in which you are interested. Do you happen to have the number of the lost bank-note?" he asked, turning to the steward.

Moody produced his slip of paper with the number on it. Mr. Troy made two copies of it before he returned the paper. One copy he put in his pocket, the other he handed to Isabel.

"Keep it carefully," he said. "Neither you nor I know how soon it may be of use to you."

Receiving the copy from him, she felt mechanically in her apron for her pocket-book. She had used it in playing with the dog, as an object to hide from him; but she had suffered, and was still suffering, too keenly to be capable of the effort of remembrance. Moody, eager to help her even in the most trifling thing, guessed what had

happened. "You were playing with Tommie," he said; "is it in the next room?"

The dog heard his name pronounced, through the open door. The next moment he trotted into the drawing-room with Isabel's pocket-book in his mouth. He was a strong, well-grown Scotch terrier of the largest size, with bright, intelligent eyes, and a coat of thick curling white hair, diversified by two light-brown patches on his back. As he reached the middle of the room, and looked from one to another of the persons present, the fine sympathy of his race told him that there was trouble among his human friends. His tail dropped; he whined softly as he approached Isabel, and laid her pocket-book at her feet.

She knelt as she picked up the pocket-book, and raised her play-fellow of happier days to take her leave of him. As the dog put his paws on her shoulders, returning her caress, her first tears fell. "Foolish of me," she said, faintly, "to cry over a dog. I can't help it. Good-bye, Tommie!"

Putting him away from her gently, she walked towards the door. The dog instantly followed. She put him away from her, for the second time, and left him. He was not to be denied; he followed her again, and took the skirt of her dress in his teeth, as if to hold her back. Robert forced the dog, growling and resisting with all his might, to let go of the dress. "Don't be rough with him," said Isabel. "Put him on her ladyship's lap; he will be quieter there." Robert obeyed. He whispered to Lady Lydiard as she received the dog; she seemed to be still incapable of speaking—she bowed her head in silent assent. Robert hurried back to Isabel before she had passed the door. "Not alone!" he said, entreatingly. "Her ladyship permits it, Isabel. Let me see you safe to your aunt's house."

Isabel looked at him, felt for him, and yielded.

"Yes," she answered, softly; "to make amends for what I said to you when I was thoughtless and happy." She waited a little to compose herself before she spoke her few farewell words to Lady Lydiard. "Good-bye, my lady. Your kindness has not been thrown away on an ungrateful girl. I love you, and thank you, with all my heart."

Lady Lydiard rose, placing the dog on the chair as she left it. She seemed to have grown older by years, instead of by minutes, in the short interval that had passed since she had hidden her face from view. "I can't bear it!" she cried, in husky, broken tones. "Isabel! Isabel! I forbid you to leave me!"

But one person present could venture to resist her. That person was Mr. Troy—and Mr. Troy knew it.

"Control yourself," he said to her, in a whisper. "The girl is

doing what is best and most becoming in her position, and is doing it with a patience and courage wonderful to see. She places herself under the protection of her nearest relative until her character is vindicated and her position in your house is once more beyond a doubt. Is this a time to throw obstacles in her way? Be worthy of yourself, Lady Lydiard, and think of the day when she will return to you without the breath of a suspicion to rest on her."

There was no disputing with him—he was too plainly in the right. Lady Lydiard submitted; she concealed the torture that her own resolution inflicted on her with an endurance which was indeed worthy of herself. Taking Isabel in her arms, she kissed her, in a passion of sorrow and love. "My poor dear! My own sweet girl! don't suppose that this is a parting kiss! I shall see you again—often and often I shall see you again at your aunt's." At a sign from Mr. Troy, Robert took Isabel's arm in his and led her away. Tommie, watching her from his chair, lifted his little white muzzle as his playfellow looked back on passing the doorway. The long, melancholy farwell howl of the dog was the last sound Isabel Miller heard as she left the house.

Part the Second.

THE DISCOVERY.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the day after Isabel left Lady Lydiard's house, Mr. Troy set forth for the Head Office in Whitehall to consult the police on the question of the missing money. He had previously sent information of the robbery to the Bank of England, and had also advertised the loss in the daily newspapers.

The air was so pleasant and the sun was so bright that he determined on proceeding to his destination on foot. He was hardly out of sight of his own offices when he was overtaken by a friend, who was also walking in the direction of Whitehall. This gentleman was a person of considerable worldly wisdom and experience; he had been officially associated with cases of striking and notorious crime, in which government had lent its assistance to discover and punish the criminals. The opinion of a person in this position might be of the greatest value to Mr. Troy, whose practice as a solicitor had thus far never brought him into collision with thieves and mysteries. He accordingly decided, in Isabel's interests, on confiding

to his friend the nature of his errand to the police. Concealing the names, but concealing nothing else, he described what had happened on the previous day at Lady Lydiard's house, and then put the question plainly to his companion,

"What would you do in my place?"

"In your place," his friend answered, quietly, "I should not waste time and money in consulting the police."

"Not consult the police!" exclaimed Mr. Troy, in amazement. "Surely I have not made myself understood? I am going to the Head Office, and I have got a letter of introduction to the chief inspector in the detective department. I am afraid I omitted to mention that."

"It doesn't make any difference," proceeded the other, as coolly as ever. "You have asked for my advice, and I give you my advice. Tear up your letter of introduction, and don't stir a step farther in the direction of Whitehall."

Mr. Troy began to understand. "You don't believe in the detective police?" he said.

"Who *can* believe in them, who reads the newspapers and remembers what he reads?" his friend rejoined. "Fortunately for the detective department, the public in general forgets what it reads. Go to your club and look at the criminal history of our own time recorded in the newspapers. Every crime is more or less a mystery. You will see that the mysteries which the police discover are, almost without exception, mysteries made penetrable by the commonest capacity, through the extraordinary stupidity exhibited in the means taken to hide the crime. On the other hand, let the guilty man or woman be a resolute and intelligent person, capable of setting his (or her) wits fairly against the wits of the police—in other words, let the mystery really *be* a mystery—and cite me a case if you can (a really difficult and perplexing case) in which the criminal has not escaped. Mind, I don't charge the police with neglecting their work. No doubt they do their best, and take the greatest pains in following the routine to which they have been trained. It is their misfortune, not their fault, that there is no man of superior intelligence among them—I mean no man who is capable, in great emergencies, of placing himself above conventional methods, and following a new way of his own. There have been such men in the police—men naturally endowed with that faculty of mental analysis which can decompose a mystery, resolve it into its component parts, and find the clew at the bottom, no matter how remote from ordinary observation it may be. But those men have died or have retired. One of them would have been invaluable to you in the case you have just mentioned to me. As things are, unless you are wrong in believing

in the young lady's innocence, the person who has stolen that bank-note will be no easy person to find. In my opinion, there is only one man now in London who is likely to be of the slightest assistance to you, and he is not in the police."

"Who is he?" asked Mr. Troy.

"An old rogue, who was once in your branch of the legal profession," the friend answered. "You may, perhaps, remember the man; they call him 'Old Sharon.'"

"What! the scoundrel who was struck off the roll of attorneys years since? Is he still alive?"

"Alive and prospering. He lives in a court or a lane running out of Long-acre, and he offers advice to persons interested in recovering missing objects of any sort. Whether you have lost your wife or lost your cigar-case, Old Sharon is equally useful to you. He has an inbred capacity for reading the riddle the right way in cases of mystery, great or small. In short, he possesses exactly that analytical faculty to which I alluded just now. I have his address at my office, if you think it worth while to try him."

"Who can trust such a man?" Mr. Troy objected. "He would be sure to deceive me."

"You are entirely mistaken. Since he was struck off the rolls Old Sharon has discovered that the straight way is, on the whole, the best way, even in a man's own interests. His consultation fee is a guinea; and he gives a signed estimate beforehand for any supplementary expenses that may follow. I can tell you (this is, of course, strictly between ourselves) that the authorities at my office took his advice in a government case that puzzled the police. We approached him, of course, through persons who were to be trusted to represent us without betraying the source from which their instructions were derived, and we found the old rascal's advice well worth paying for. It is quite likely that he may not succeed so well in your case. Try the police, by all means; and if they fail, why, there is Sharon as a last resource."

This arrangement commended itself to Mr. Troy's professional caution. He went on to Whitehall, and he tried the detective police. They at once adopted the obvious conclusion, to persons of ordinary capacity—the conclusion that Isabel was the thief.

Acting on this conviction, the authorities sent an experienced woman from the office to Lady Lydiard's house to examine the poor girl's clothes and ornaments before they were packed up and sent after her to her aunt's. The search led to nothing. The only objects of any value that were discovered had been presents from Lady Lydiard. No jewellers' or milliners' bills were among the papers found in her desk. Not a sign of secret extravagance in dress was

to be seen anywhere. Defeated so far, the police proposed next to have Isabel privately watched. There might be a prodigal lover somewhere in the background, with ruin staring him in the face unless he could raise five hundred pounds. Lady Lydiard (who had only consented to the search under stress of persuasive argument from Mr. Troy) resented this ingenious idea as an insult. She declared that if Isabel was watched, the girl should know of it instantly from her own lips. The police listened with perfect resignation and decorum, and politely shifted their ground. A certain suspicion (they remarked) always rested in cases of this sort on the servants. Would her ladyship object to private inquiries into the characters and proceedings of the servants? Her ladyship instantly objected, in the most positive terms. Thereupon the "inspector" asked for a minute's private conversation with Mr. Troy. "The thief is certainly a member of Lady Lydiard's household," this functionary remarked, in his politely positive way. "If her ladyship persists in refusing to let us make the necessary inquiries, our hands are tied, and the case comes to an end through no fault of ours. If her ladyship changes her mind, perhaps you will drop me a line, sir, to that effect. Good-morning."

So the experiment of consulting the police came to an untimely end. The one result obtained was the expression of purblind opinion by the authorities of the detective department, which pointed at Isabel, or at one of the servants, as the undiscovered thief. Thinking the matter over in the retirement of his own office, and not forgetting his promise to Isabel to leave no means untried of establishing her innocence, Mr. Troy could see but one alternative left to him. He took up his pen and wrote to his friend at the government office. There was nothing for it now but to run the risk, and try Old Sharon.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day Mr. Troy (taking Robert Moody with him as a valuable witness) rang the bell at the mean and dirty lodging-house in which Old Sharon received the clients who stood in need of his advice.

They were led up stairs to a back room on the second floor of the house. Entering the room, they discovered, through a thick cloud of tobacco-smoke, a small, fat, bald-headed, dirty old man in an arm-chair, robed in a tattered flannel dressing-gown, with a short pipe in his mouth, a pug-dog on his lap, and a French novel in his hands.

"Is it business?" asked Old Sharon, speaking in a hoarse, asth-

matical voice, and fixing a pair of bright, shameless black eyes attentively on the two visitors.

"It *is* business," Mr. Troy answered, looking at the old rogue who had disgraced an honorable profession as he might have looked at a reptile which had just risen rampant at his feet. "What is your fee for a consultation?"

"You give me a guinea and I'll give you half an hour." With this reply Old Sharon held out his unwashed hand across the rickety, ink-splashed table at which he was sitting.

Mr. Troy would not have touched him with the tips of his own fingers for a thousand pounds. He laid the guinea on the table.

Old Sharon burst into a fierce laugh—a laugh strangely accompanied by a frowning contraction of his eyebrows, and a frightful exhibition of the whole inside of his mouth. "I'm not clean enough for you, eh?" he said, with an appearance of being very much amused. "There's a dirty old man described in this book that is a little like me." He held up his French novel. "Have you read it? A capital story—well put together. Ah, you haven't read it? You have got a pleasure to come. I say, do you mind tobacco-smoke? I think faster while I smoke—that's all."

Mr. Troy's respectable hand waved a silent permission to smoke, given under dignified protest.

"All right," said Old Sharon. "Now, get on."

He laid himself back in his chair and puffed out his smoke, with eyes lazily half closed, like the eyes of the pug-dog on his lap. At that moment, indeed, there was a curious resemblance between the two. They both seemed to be preparing themselves, in the same idle way, for the same comfortable nap.

Mr. Troy stated the circumstances under which the five-hundred-pound note had disappeared in clear and consecutive narrative. When he had done, Old Sharon suddenly opened his eyes. The pug-dog suddenly opened his eyes. Old Sharon looked hard at Mr. Troy. The pug looked hard at Mr. Troy. Old Sharon spoke. The pug growled.

"I know who you are—you're a lawyer. Don't be alarmed; I never saw you before, and I don't know your name. What I do know is a lawyer's statement of facts when I hear it. Who's this?" Old Sharon looked inquisitively at Moody as he put the question.

Mr. Troy introduced Moody as a competent witness, thoroughly acquainted with the circumstances, and ready and willing to answer any questions relating to them. Old Sharon waited a little, smoking hard and thinking hard. "Now, then!" he burst out, in his fiercely sudden way, "I'm going to get to the root of the matter."

He leaned forward with his elbows on the table, and began his

examination of Moody. Heartily as Mr. Troy despised and disliked the old rogue, he listened with astonishment and admiration, literally extorted from him by the marvellous ability with which the questions were adapted to the end in view. In a quarter of an hour Old Sharon had extracted from the witness everything, literally everything, down to the smallest detail, that Moody could tell him. Having now, in his own phrase, "got to the root of the matter," he relit his pipe with a grunt of satisfaction, and laid himself back again in his old arm-chair.

"Well," said Mr. Troy, "have you formed your opinion?"

"Yes; I've formed my opinion."

"What is it?"

Instead of replying, Old Sharon winked confidentially at Mr. Troy, and put a question on his side.

"I say! is a ten-pound note much of an object to you?"

"It depends," answered Mr. Troy, "on what the money is wanted for."

"Look here," said Old Sharon; "I can give you an opinion for your guinea; but, mind this, it's an opinion founded on hearsay—and you know as a lawyer what that is worth. Venture your ten pounds—in plain English, pay me for my time and trouble in a baffling and difficult case—and I'll give you an opinion founded on my own experience."

"Explain yourself a little more clearly," said Mr. Troy. "What do you guarantee to tell us if we venture the ten pounds?"

"I guarantee to name the person, or the persons, on whom the suspicion really rests. And if you employ me after that, I guarantee (before you pay me a half-penny more) to prove that I am right by laying my hand on the thief."

"Let us have the guinea opinion first," said Mr. Troy.

Old Sharon made another frightful exhibition of the whole inside of his mouth; his laugh was louder and fiercer than ever. "I like you," he said to Mr. Troy, "you are so devilish fond of your money. Lord! how rich you must be! Now listen. Here's the guinea opinion: Suspect, in this case, the very last person on whom suspicion could possibly fall."

Moody, listening attentively, started and changed color at these last words. Mr. Troy looked thoroughly disappointed, and made no attempt to conceal it. "Is that all?" he asked.

"All?" retorted the cynical vagabond. "You're a pretty lawyer! What more can I say, when I don't know for certain whether the witness who has given me my information has misled me or not? Have I spoken to the girl, and formed my own opinion? No! Have I been introduced among the servants (as errand-boy, or to clean

the boots and shoes, or what not), and have I formed my own judgment of *them*? No! I take your opinions for granted, and I tell you how I should set to work myself if they were *my* opinions too; and that's a guinea's worth—a devilish good guinea's worth to a rich man like you!"

Old Sharon's logic produced a certain effect on Mr. Troy, in spite of himself. It was smartly put, from his point of view—there was no denying that.

"Even if I consented to your proposal," he said, "I should object to your annoying the young lady with impertinent questions, or to your being introduced as a spy into a respectable house."

Old Sharon doubled his dirty fists and drummed with them on the rickety table in a comical frenzy of impatience while Mr. Troy was speaking.

"What the devil do you know about my way of doing my business?" he burst out, when the lawyer had done. "One of us two is talking like a born idiot, and (mind this) it isn't me. Look here! Your young lady goes out for a walk, and she meets with a dirty, shabby old beggar—I look like a shabby old beggar already, don't I? Very good. This dirty old wretch whines and whimpers and tells a long story, and gets sixpence out of the girl, and knows her by that time, inside and out, as well as if he had made her—and, mark! hasn't asked her a single question, and, instead of annoying her, has made her happy in the performance of a charitable action. Stop a bit. I haven't done with you yet. Who blacks your boots and shoes? Look here!" He pushed his pug-dog off his lap, dived under the table, appeared again with an old boot and a bottle of blacking, and set to work with tigerish activity. "I'm going out for a walk, you know, and I may as well make myself smart." With that announcement he began to sing over his work—a song of sentiment, popular in England in the early part of the present century—"She's all my fancy painted her, she's lovely, she's divine; but her heart it is another's, and it never can be mine! Too-ral-loo-ral-loo.' I like a love-song. Brush away! brush away! till I see my own pretty face in the blacking. Hey! Here's a nice, harmless, jolly old man! sings and jokes over his work, and makes the kitchen quite cheerful. What's that you say? He's a stranger, and don't talk to him too freely. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to speak in that way of a poor old fellow with one foot in the grave. Mrs. Cook will give him a nice bit of dinner in the scullery, and John Footman will look out an old coat for him. And when he's heard everything he wants to hear, and doesn't come back again the next day to his work, what do they think of it in the servants' hall? Do they say 'We've had a spy among us?' Yah! you know better

than that by this time. The cheerful old man has been run over in the street, or is down with the fever, or has turned up his toes in the parish dead-house—that's what they say in the servants' hall. Try me in your own kitchen, and see if your servants take me for a spy. Come, come, Mr. Lawyer! out with your ten pounds, and don't waste any more precious time about it!"

"I will consider, and let you know," said Mr. Troy.

Old Sharon laughed more ferociously than ever, and hobbled round the table in a great hurry to the place at which Moody was sitting. He laid one hand on the steward's shoulder, and pointed derisively with the other to Mr. Troy.

"I say, Mr. Silent-man! Bet you five pounds I never hear of that lawyer again!"

Silently attentive all through the interview (except when he was answering questions), Moody only replied in the fewest possible words. "I don't bet," was all he said. He showed no resentment at Sharon's familiarity, and he appeared to find no amusement in Sharon's extraordinary talk. The old vagabond seemed actually to produce a serious impression on him. When Mr. Troy set the example of rising to go, he still kept his seat, and looked at the lawyer as if he regretted leaving the atmosphere of tobacco-smoke reeking in the dirty room.

"Have you anything to say before we go?" Mr. Troy asked.

Moody rose slowly, and looked at Old Sharon. "Not just now, sir," he replied, looking away again, after a moment's reflection.

Old Sharon interpreted Moody's look and Moody's reply from his own peculiar point of view. He suddenly drew the steward away into a corner of the room.

"I say!" he began, in a whisper. "Upon your solemn word of honor, you know—are you as rich as the lawyer there?"

"Certainly not."

"Look here! It's half price to a poor man. If you feel like coming back, on your own account, five pounds will do from *you*. There! there! Think of it—think of it."

"Now, then?" said Mr. Troy, waiting for his companion, with the door open in his hand. He looked back at Sharon when Moody joined him. The old vagabond was settled again in his arm-chair, with his dog in his lap, his pipe in his mouth, and his French novel in his hand, exhibiting exactly the picture of frowzy comfort which he had presented when his visitors first entered the room.

"Good-day," said Mr. Troy, with haughty condescension.

"Don't interrupt me," rejoined Old Sharon, absorbed in his novel. "You've had your guinea's worth. Lord! what a lovely book this is! Don't interrupt me."

"Impudent scoundrel!" said Mr. Troy, when he and Moody were in the street again. "What could my friend mean by recommending him? Fancy his expecting me to trust him with ten pounds! I consider even the guinea completely thrown away."

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Moody, "I don't quite agree with you there."

"What! you don't mean to tell me you understand that oracular sentence of his—'Suspect the very last person on whom suspicion could possibly fall'? Rubbish!"

"I don't say I understand it, sir. I only say it has set me thinking."

"Thinking of what? Do your suspicions point to the thief?"

"If you will please to excuse me, Mr. Troy, I should like to wait a while before I answer that."

Mr. Troy suddenly stood still, and eyed his companion a little distrustfully.

"Are you going to turn detective policeman on your own account?" he asked.

"There's nothing I won't turn to, and try, to help Miss Isabel in this matter," Moody answered, firmly. "I have saved a few hundred pounds in Lady Lydiard's service, and I am ready to spend every farthing of it if I can only discover the thief."

Mr. Troy walked on again. "Miss Isabel seems to have a good friend in you," he said. He was (perhaps unconsciously) a little offended by the independent tone in which the steward spoke, after he had himself engaged to take the vindication of the girl's innocence into his own hands.

"Miss Isabel has a devoted servant and slave in me," Moody answered, with passionate enthusiasm.

"Very creditable; I haven't a word to say against it," Mr. Troy rejoined. "But don't forget that the young lady has other devoted friends besides you. I am her devoted friend, for instance; I have promised to serve her, and I mean to keep my word. You will excuse me for adding that my experience and discretion are quite as likely to be useful to her as your enthusiasm. I know the world well enough to be careful in trusting strangers. It will do you no harm, Mr. Moody, to follow my example."

Moody accepted his reproof with becoming patience and resignation. "If you have anything to propose, sir, that will be of service to Miss Isabel," he said, "I shall be happy if I can assist you in the humblest capacity."

"And if not?" Mr. Troy inquired, conscious of having nothing to propose as he asked the question.

"In that case, sir, I must take my own course, and blame nobody but myself if it leads me astray."

Mr. Troy said no more; he parted from Moody at the next turning.

Pursuing the subject privately in his own mind, he decided on taking the earliest opportunity of visiting Isabel at her aunt's house, and on warning her, in her future intercourse with Moody, not to trust too much to the steward's discretion. "I haven't a doubt," thought the lawyer, "of what he means to do next. The infatuated fool is going back to Old Sharon!"

CHAPTER X.

RETURNING to his office, Mr. Troy discovered, among the correspondence that was waiting for him, a letter from the very person whose welfare was still the uppermost subject in his mind. Isabel Miller wrote in these terms:

"DEAR SIR,—My aunt, Miss Pink, is very desirous of consulting you professionally at the earliest opportunity. Although South Morden is within little more than half an hour's railway ride from London, Miss Pink does not presume to ask you to visit her, being well aware of the value of your time. Will you, therefore, be so kind as to let me know when it will be convenient to you to receive my aunt at your office in London? Believe me, dear sir,

"Respectfully yours, ISABEL MILLER.

"P.S.—I am further instructed to say that the regrettable event at Lady Lydiard's house is the proposed subject of the consultation.

"THE LAWN, SOUTH MORDEN. THURSDAY."

Mr. Troy smiled as he read the letter. "Too formal for a young girl," he said to himself. "Every word of it has been dictated by Miss Pink." He was not long in deciding what course he should take. There was a pressing necessity for cautioning Isabel, and here was his opportunity. He sent for his head clerk, and looked at his list of engagements for the day. There was nothing set down in the book which the clerk was not quite as well able to manage as the master. Mr. Troy consulted his railway-guide, ordered his cab, and caught the next train to South Morden.

South Morden was then (and remains to this day) one of those primitive agricultural villages, passed over by the march of modern progress, which are still to be found in the near neighborhood of London. Only the slow trains stopped at the station; and there was so little to do that the station-master and his porter grew flowers on the embankment, and trained creepers over the waiting-room win-

dow. Turning your back on the railway, and walking along the one street of South Morden, you found yourself in the old England of two centuries since. Gabled cottages, with fast-closed windows; pigs and poultry in quiet possession of the road; the venerable church surrounded by its shady burial-ground; the grocer's shop which sold everything, and the butcher's shop which sold nothing; the scarce inhabitants who liked a good look at a stranger, and the unwashed children who were pictures of dirty health; the clash of the iron-chained bucket in the public well, and the thump of the falling ninepins in the skittle-ground behind the public-house; the horse-pond on one bit of open ground, and the old elm-tree with the wooden seat round it on the other—these were some of the objects that you saw and some of the noises that you heard in South Morden, as you passed from one end of the village to the other.

About half a mile beyond the last of the old cottages modern England met you again under the form of a row of little villas, set up by an adventurous London builder who had bought the land a bargain. Each villa stood in its own little garden, and looked across a stony road at the meadow lands and softly rising wooded hills beyond. Each villa faced you in the sunshine with the horrid glare of new red brick, and forced its nonsensical name on your attention, traced in bright paint on the posts of its entrance gate. Consulting the posts as he advanced, Mr. Troy arrived in due course of time at the villa called *The Lawn*, which derived its name apparently from a circular patch of grass in front of the house. The gate resisting his efforts to open it, he rang the bell.

Admitted by a trim, clean, shy little maid-servant, Mr. Troy looked about him in silent amazement. Turn which way he might, he found himself silently confronted by posted and painted instructions to visitors, which forbade him to do this, and commanded him to do that, at every step of his progress from the gate to the house. On one side of the lawn a label informed him that he was not to walk on the grass. On the other side a painted hand pointed along a boundary wall to an inscription which warned him to go that way if he had business in the kitchen. On the gravel-walk at the foot of the house steps words, neatly traced in little white shells, reminded him not to "forget the scraper." On the doorstep he was informed, in letters of lead, that he was "Welcome!" On the mat in the passage bristly black words burst on his attention, commanding him to "wipe his shoes." Even the hat-stand in the hall was not allowed to speak for itself; it had "*Hats and Cloaks*" inscribed on it, and it issued its directions imperatively in the matter of your wet umbrella—"Put it here!"

Giving the trim little servant his card, Mr. Troy was introduced

to a reception-room on the lower floor. Before he had time to look round him, the door was opened again from without, and Isabel stole into the room on tiptoe. She looked worn and anxious. When she shook hands with the old lawyer the charming smile that he remembered so well was gone.

"Don't say you have seen me," she whispered. "I am not to come into the room till my aunt sends for me. Tell me two things before I run away again. How is Lady Lydiard? And have you discovered the thief?"

"Lady Lydiard was well when I last saw her, and we have not yet succeeded in discovering the thief." Having answered the questions in those terms, Mr. Troy decided on cautioning Isabel on the subject of the steward while he had the chance. "One question on my side," he said, holding her back from the door by the arm. "Do you expect Moody to visit you here?"

"I am *sure* he will visit me," Isabel answered, warmly. "He has promised to come here, at my request. I never knew what a kind heart Robert Moody had till this misfortune fell on me. My aunt, who is not easily taken with strangers, respects and admires him. I can't tell you how good he was to me on the journey here, and how kindly, how nobly, he spoke to me when we parted." She paused, and turned her head away. The tears were rising in her eyes. "In my situation," she said, faintly, "kindness is very keenly felt. Don't notice me, Mr. Troy."

The lawyer waited a moment to let her recover herself.

"I agree entirely, my dear, in your opinion of Moody," he said. "At the same time, I think it right to warn you that his zeal in your service may possibly outrun his discretion. He may feel too confidently about penetrating the mystery of the missing money, and, unless you are on your guard, he may raise false hopes in you when you next see him. Listen to any advice that he may give you, by all means; but before you decide on being guided by his opinion, consult my older experience, and hear what I have to say on the subject. Don't suppose that I am attempting to make you distrust this good friend," he added, noticing the look of uneasy surprise which Isabel fixed on him. "No such idea is in my mind. I only warn you that Moody's eagerness to be of service to you may mislead him. You understand me?"

"Yes, sir," replied Isabel, coldly; "I understand you. Please let me go now. My aunt will be down directly, and she must not find me here." She courtesied with distant respect, and left the room.

"So much for trying to put two ideas together into a girl's mind," thought Mr. Troy, when he was alone again. "The little fool evi-

dently thinks I am jealous of Moody's place in her estimation. Well, I have done my duty, and I can do no more."

He looked round the room. Not a chair was out of its place, not a speck of dust was to be seen. The brightly perfect polish of the table made your eyes ache; the ornaments on it looked as if they had never been touched by mortal hand; the piano was an object for distant admiration, not an instrument to be played on; the carpet made Mr. Troy look nervously at the soles of his shoes; and the sofa (protected by layers of white crochet-work) said as plainly as if in words, "Sit on me if you dare!" Mr. Troy retreated to a book-case at the farther end of the room. The books fitted the shelves to such absolute perfection that he had some difficulty in taking one of them out. When he had succeeded, he found himself in possession of a volume of the "History of England." On the fly-leaf he encountered another written warning: "This book belongs to Miss Pink's Academy for Young Ladies, and is not to be removed from the library." The date, which was added, referred to a period of ten years since. Miss Pink now stood revealed as a retired school-mistress; and Mr. Troy began to understand some of the characteristic peculiarities of that lady's establishment which had puzzled him up to the present time.

He had just succeeded in putting the book back again when the door opened once more, and Isabel's aunt entered the room.

If Miss Pink could, by any possible conjuncture of circumstances, have disappeared mysteriously from her house and her friends, the police would have found the greatest difficulty in composing the necessary description of the missing lady. The acutest observer could have discovered nothing that was noticeable or characteristic in her personal appearance. The pen of the present writer portrays her in despair by a series of negatives. She was not young, she was not old; she was neither tall nor short, nor stout nor thin; nobody could call her features attractive, and nobody could call them ugly; there was nothing in her voice, her expression, her manner, or her dress that differed in any appreciable degree from the voice, expression, manner, and dress of five hundred thousand other single ladies of her age and position in the world. If you had asked her to describe herself, she would have answered, "I am a gentlewoman;" and if you had further inquired which of her numerous accomplishments took highest rank in her own esteem, she would have replied, "My powers of conversation." For the rest, she was Miss Pink, of South Morden; and when that has been said, all has been said.

"Pray be seated, sir. We have had a beautiful day, after the late long-continued wet weather. I am told that the season is very unfavorable for wall-fruit. May I offer you some refreshment after

your journey?" In these terms, and in the smoothest of voices, Miss Pink opened the interview.

Mr. Troy made a polite reply, and added a few strictly conventional remarks on the beauty of the neighborhood. Not even a lawyer could sit in Miss Pink's presence, and hear Miss Pink's conversation, without feeling himself called upon (in the nursery phrase) to "be on his best behavior."

"It is extremely kind of you, Mr. Troy, to favor me with this visit," Miss Pink resumed. "I am well aware that the time of professional gentlemen is of especial value to them; and I will therefore ask you to excuse me if I proceed abruptly to the subject on which I desire to consult your experience."

Here the lady modestly smoothed out her dress over her knees, and the lawyer made a bow. Miss Pink's highly trained conversation had perhaps one fault—it was not, strictly speaking, conversation at all. In its effect on her hearers it rather resembled the contents of a fluently conventional letter, read aloud.

"The circumstances under which my niece Isabel has left Lady Lydiard's house," Miss Pink proceeded, "are so indescribably painful—I will go further, I will say so deeply humiliating—that I have forbidden her to refer to them again in my presence, or to mention them in the future to any living creature besides myself. You are acquainted with those circumstances, Mr. Troy; and you will understand my indignation when I first learned that my sister's child had been suspected of theft. I have not the honor of being acquainted with Lady Lydiard. She is not a countess, I believe? Just so! her husband was only a baron. I am not acquainted with Lady Lydiard, and I will not trust myself to say what I think of her conduct to my niece."

"Pardon me, madam," Mr. Troy interposed. "Before you say any more about Lady Lydiard, I must really beg leave to observe—" "Pardon me," Miss Pink rejoined, "I never form a hasty judgment. Lady Lydiard's conduct is beyond the reach of any defence, no matter how ingenious it may be. You may not be aware, sir, that in receiving my niece under her roof her ladyship was receiving a gentlewoman by birth as well as by education. My late lamented sister was the daughter of a clergyman of the Church of England. I need hardly remind you that, as such, she was a born lady. Under favoring circumstances, Isabel's maternal grandfather might have been Archbishop of Canterbury, and have taken precedence of the whole House of Peers, the princes of the blood royal alone excepted. I am not prepared to say that my niece is equally well connected on her father's side. My sister surprised—I will not add shocked—us when she married a chemist. At the same

time, a chemist is not a tradesman. He is a gentleman at one end of the profession of medicine, and a titled physician is a gentleman at the other end. That is all. In inviting Isabel to reside with her, Lady Lydiard, I repeat, was bound to remember that she was associating herself with a young gentlewoman. She has *not* remembered this, which is one insult; and she has suspected my niece of theft, which is another."

Miss Pink paused to take breath. Mr. Troy made a second attempt to get a hearing.

"Will you kindly permit me, madam, to say two words?"

"No!" said Miss Pink, asserting the most immovable obstinacy under the blindest politeness of manner. "Your time, Mr. Troy, is really too valuable. Not even your trained intellect can excuse conduct which is manifestly *inexcusable* on the face of it. Now you know my opinion of Lady Lydiard, you will not be surprised to hear that I decline to trust her ladyship. She may, or she may not, cause the necessary inquiries to be made for the vindication of my niece's character. In a matter so serious as this—I may say, in a duty which I owe to the memories of my sister and my parents—I will not leave the responsibility to Lady Lydiard. I will take it on myself. Let me add that I am able to pay the necessary expenses. The earlier years of my life, Mr. Troy, have been passed in the tuition of young ladies. I have been happy in meriting the confidence of parents, and I have been strict in observing the golden rules of economy. On my retirement, I have been able to invest a modest, a very modest, little fortune in the Funds. A portion of it is at the service of my niece for the recovery of her good name; and I desire to place the necessary investigation, confidentially, in your hands. You are acquainted with the case, and the case naturally goes to you. I could not prevail on myself—I really could not prevail on myself—to mention it to a stranger. That is the business on which I wished to consult you. Please say nothing more about Lady Lydiard; the subject is inexpressibly disagreeable to me. I will only trespass on your kindness to tell me if I have succeeded in making myself understood."

Miss Pink leaned back in her chair at the exact angle permitted by the laws of propriety, rested her left elbow on the palm of her right hand, and lightly supported her cheek with her forefinger and thumb. In this position she waited Mr. Troy's answer—the living picture of human obstinacy in its most respectable form.

If Mr. Troy had not been a lawyer—in other words, if he had not been professionally capable of persisting in his own course in the face of every conceivable difficulty and discouragement—Miss Pink might have remained in undisturbed possession of her own opin-

ions. As it was, Mr. Troy had got his hearing at last; and no matter how obstinately she might close her eyes to it, Miss Pink was now destined to have the other side of the case presented to her view.

"I am sincerely obliged to you, madam, for the expression of your confidence in me," Mr. Troy began; "at the same time, I must beg you to excuse me if I decline to accept your proposal."

Miss Pink had not expected to receive such an answer as this. The lawyer's brief refusal surprised and annoyed her.

"Why do you decline to assist me?" she asked.

"Because," answered Mr. Troy, "my services are already engaged in Miss Isabel's interest by a client whom I have served for more than twenty years. My client is—"

Miss Pink anticipated the coming disclosure. "You need not trouble yourself, sir, to mention your client's name," she said.

"My client," persisted Mr. Troy, "loves Miss Isabel dearly—"

"That is a matter of opinion," Miss Pink interposed.

"And believes in Miss Isabel's innocence," proceeded the irrepressible lawyer, "as firmly as you believe in it yourself."

Miss Pink (being human) had a temper, and Mr. Troy had found his way to it.

"If Lady Lydiard believes in my niece's innocence," said Miss Pink, suddenly sitting bolt-upright in her chair, "why has my niece been compelled, in justice to herself, to leave Lady Lydiard's house?"

"You will admit, madam," Mr. Troy answered, cautiously, "that we are all of us liable, in this wicked world, to be the victim of appearances. Your niece is a victim—an innocent victim. She wisely withdraws from Lady Lydiard's house until appearances are proved to be false, and her position is cleared up."

Miss Pink had her reply ready. "That is simply acknowledging, in other words, that my niece is suspected. I am only a woman, Mr. Troy, but it is not quite so easy to mislead me as you seem to suppose."

Mr. Troy's temper was admirably trained, but it began to acknowledge that Miss Pink's powers of irritation could sting to some purpose.

"No intention of misleading you, madam, has ever crossed my mind," he rejoined, warmly. "As for your niece, I can tell you this. In all my experience of Lady Lydiard I never saw her so distressed as she was when Miss Isabel left the house."

"Indeed?" said Miss Pink, with an incredulous smile. "In my rank of life, when we feel distressed about a person, we do our best to comfort that person by a kind letter or an early visit. But then I am not a lady of title."

"Lady Lydiard engaged herself to call on Miss Isabel in my hearing," said Mr. Troy. "Lady Lydiard is the most generous woman living."

"Lady Lydiard is here!" cried a joyful voice on the other side of the door.

At the same moment Isabel burst into the room in a state of excitement which actually ignored the formidable presence of Miss Pink. "I beg your pardon, aunt. I was up-stairs at the window, and I saw the carriage stop at the gate. And Tommie has come too! The darling saw me at the window!" cried the poor girl, her eyes sparkling with delight, as a perfect explosion of barking made itself heard over the tramp of horses' feet and the crash of carriage wheels outside.

Miss Pink rose slowly, with a dignity that looked capable of adequately receiving, not one noble lady only, but the whole peerage of England.

"Control yourself, dear Isabel," she said. "No well-bred young lady permits herself to become unduly excited. Stand by my side—a little behind me."

Isabel obeyed. Mr. Troy kept his place, and privately enjoyed his triumph over Miss Pink. If Lady Lydiard had been actually in league with him, she could not have chosen a more opportune time for her visit. A momentary interval passed; the carriage drew up at the door; the horses trampled on the gravel; the bell rang madly; the uproar of Tommie, released from the carriage and clamoring to be let in, redoubled its fury. Never before had such an unruly burst of noises invaded the tranquillity of Miss Pink's villa.

CHAPTER XI.

THE trim little maid-servant ran up-stairs from her modest little kitchen, trembling at the terrible prospect of having to open the door. Miss Pink, deafened by the barking, had just time to say, "What a very ill-behaved dog!" when a sound of small objects overthrown in the hall, and a scurrying of furious claws across the oilcloth, announced that Tommie had invaded the house. As the servant appeared, introducing Lady Lydiard, the dog ran in. He made one frantic leap at Isabel, which would certainly have knocked her down but for the chair that happened to be standing behind her. Received on her lap, the faithful creature half smothered her with his caresses. He barked, he shrieked, in his joy at seeing her again. He jumped off her lap and tore round and round the room at the top of his speed, and every time he passed Miss

Pink he showed the whole range of his teeth, and snarled ferociously at her ankles. Having at last exhausted his superfluous energy, he leaped back again on Isabel's lap, with his tongue quivering in his open mouth, his tail wagging softly, and his eye on Miss Pink, inquiring how she liked a dog in her drawing-room.

"I hope my dog has not disturbed you, ma'am?" said Lady Lydiard, advancing from the mat at the doorway, on which she had patiently waited until the raptures of Tommie subsided into repose.

Miss Pink, trembling between terror and indignation, acknowledged Lady Lydiard's polite inquiry by a ceremonious bow, and an answer which administered by implication a dignified reproof. "Your ladyship's dog does not appear to be a very well-trained animal," the ex-schoolmistress remarked.

"Well trained?" Lady Lydiard repeated, as if the expression were perfectly unintelligible to her; "I don't think you have had much experience of dogs, ma'am." She turned to Isabel, and embraced her tenderly. "Give me a kiss, my dear. You don't know how wretched I have been since you left me." She looked back again at Miss Pink. "You are not, perhaps, aware, ma'am, that my dog is devotedly attached to your niece. A dog's love has been considered by many great men (whose names at the moment escape me) as the most touching and disinterested of all earthly affections." She looked the other way, and discovered the lawyer. "How do you do, Mr. Troy? It's a pleasant surprise to find you here. The house was so dull without Isabel that I really couldn't put off seeing her any longer. When you are more used to Tommie, Miss Pink, you will understand and admire him. *You* understand and admire him, Isabel, don't you? My child, you are not looking well. I shall take you back with me when the horses have had their rest. We shall never be happy away from each other."

Having expressed her sentiments, distributed her greetings, and defended her dog—all, as it were, in one breath—Lady Lydiard sat down by Isabel's side, and opened a large green fan that hung at her girdle. "You have no idea, Miss Pink, how fat people suffer in hot weather," said the old lady, using her fan vigorously.

Miss Pink's eyes dropped modestly to the ground—"fat" was such a coarse word to use, if a lady *must* speak of her own superfluous flesh! "May I offer some refreshment?" Miss Pink asked, mincingly. "A cup of tea?"

Lady Lydiard shook her head.

"A glass of water?"

Lady Lydiard declined this last hospitable proposal with an exclamation of disgust. "Have you got any beer?" she inquired.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," said Miss Pink, doubting the evidence of her own ears. "Did you say—beer?"

Lady Lydiard gesticulated vehemently with her fan. "Yes, to be sure! Beer! beer!"

Miss Pink rose, with a countenance expressive of genteel disgust, and rang the bell. "I think you have beer down-stairs, Susan?" she said, when the maid appeared at the door.

"Yes, miss."

"A glass of beer for Lady Lydiard," said Miss Pink, under protest.

"Bring it in a jug," shouted her ladyship, as the maid left the room. "I like to froth it up for myself," she continued, addressing Miss Pink. "Isabel sometimes does it for me, when she is at home; don't you, my dear?"

Miss Pink had been waiting her opportunity to assert her own claim to the possession of her own niece from the time when Lady Lydiard had coolly declared her intention of taking Isabel back with her. The opportunity now presented itself.

"Your ladyship will pardon me," she said, "if I remark that my niece's home is under my humble roof. I am properly sensible, I hope, of your kindness to Isabel; but while she remains the object of a disgraceful suspicion, she remains with Me."

Lady Lydiard closed her fan with an angry snap.

"You are completely mistaken, Miss Pink. You may not mean it, but you speak most unjustly if you say that your niece is an object of suspicion to me or to anybody in my house."

Mr. Troy, quietly listening up to this point, now interposed to stop the discussion before it could degenerate into a personal quarrel. His keen observation, aided by his accurate knowledge of his client's character, had plainly revealed to him what was passing in Lady Lydiard's mind. She had entered the house, feeling (perhaps unconsciously) a jealousy of Miss Pink as her predecessor in Isabel's affections, and as the natural protectress of the girl under existing circumstances. Miss Pink's reception of her dog had additionally irritated the old lady. She had taken a malicious pleasure in shocking the schoolmistress's sense of propriety, and she was now only too ready to proceed to further extremities on the delicate question of Isabel's justification for leaving her house. For Isabel's own sake, therefore—to say nothing of other reasons—it was urgently desirable to keep the peace between the two ladies. With this excellent object in view, Mr. Troy seized his opportunity of striking into the conversation for the first time.

"Pardon me, Lady Lydiard," he said, "you are speaking of a subject which has been already sufficiently discussed between Miss

Pink and myself. I think we shall do better not to dwell uselessly on past events, but to direct our attention to the future. We are all equally satisfied of the complete rectitude of Miss Isabel's conduct, and we are all equally interested in the vindication of her good name."

Whether these temperate words would of themselves have exercised the pacifying influence at which Mr. Troy aimed may be doubtful. But, as he ceased speaking, a powerful auxiliary appeared in the shape of the beer. Lady Lydiard seized on the jug, and filled the tumbler for herself with an unsteady hand. Miss Pink, trembling for the integrity of her carpet, and scandalized at seeing a peeress drinking beer like a washerwoman, forgot the sharp answer that was just rising to her lips when the lawyer interfered. "Small!" said Lady Lydiard, setting down the empty tumbler, and referring to the quality of the beer. "But very pleasant and refreshing. What's the servant's name? Susan? Well, Susan, I was dying of thirst, and you have saved my life. You can leave the jug; I dare say I shall empty it before I go."

Mr. Troy, watching Miss Pink's face, saw that it was time to change the subject again.

"Did you notice the old village, Lady Lydiard, on your way here?" he asked. "The artists consider it one of the most picturesque places in England."

"I noticed that it was a very dirty village," Lady Lydiard answered, still bent on making herself disagreeable to Miss Pink. "The artists may say what they please; I see nothing to admire in rotten cottages and bad drainage and ignorant people. I suppose the neighborhood has its advantages. It looks dull enough, to my mind."

Isabel had hitherto modestly restricted her exertions to keeping Tommie quiet on her lap. Like Mr. Troy, she occasionally looked at her aunt, and she now made a timid attempt to defend the neighborhood, as a duty that she owed to Miss Pink.

"Oh, my lady! don't say it's a dull neighborhood," she pleaded. "There are such pretty walks all round us. And when you get to the hills the view is beautiful."

Lady Lydiard's answer to this was a little masterpiece of good-humored contempt. She patted Isabel's cheek, and said, "Pooh! pooh!"

"Your ladyship does not admire the beauties of nature," Miss Pink remarked, with a compassionate smile. "As we get older, no doubt our sight begins to fail—"

"And we leave off canting about the beauties of nature," added Lady Lydiard. "I hate the country. Give me London, and the pleasures of society."

"Come! come! Do the country justice, Lady Lydiard!" put in

peace-making Mr. Troy. "There is plenty of society to be found out of London—as good society as the world can show."

"The sort of society," added Miss Pink, "which is to be found, for example, in this neighborhood. Her ladyship is evidently not aware that persons of distinction surround us whichever way we turn. I may instance, among others, the Honorable Mr. Hardyman—"

Lady Lydiard, in the act of pouring out a second glassful of beer, suddenly set down the jug.

"Who is that you're talking of, Miss Pink?"

"I am talking of our neighbor, Lady Lydiard, the Honorable Mr. Hardyman."

"Do you mean Alfred Hardyman, the man who breeds the horses?"

"The distinguished gentleman who owns the famous stud farm," said Miss Pink, correcting the bluntly direct form in which Lady Lydiard had put her question.

"Is he in the habit of visiting here?" the old lady inquired, with a sudden appearance of anxiety. "Do you know him?"

"I had the honor of being introduced to Mr. Hardyman at our last flower-show," Miss Pink replied. "He has not yet favored me with a visit."

Lady Lydiard's anxiety appeared to be to some extent relieved.

"I knew that Hardyman's farm was in this county," she said, "but I had no notion that it was in the neighborhood of South Morden. How far away is he—ten or a dozen miles, eh?"

"Not more than three miles," answered Miss Pink. "We consider him quite a near neighbor of ours."

Renewed anxiety showed itself in Lady Lydiard. She looked round sharply at Isabel. The girl's head was bent so low over the rough head of the dog that her face was almost entirely concealed from view. So far as appearances went, she seemed to be entirely absorbed in fondling Tommie. Lady Lydiard roused her with a tap of the green fan.

"Take Tommie out, Isabel, for a run in the garden," she said. "He won't sit still much longer, and he may annoy Miss Pink. Mr. Troy, will you kindly help Isabel to keep my ill-trained dog in order?"

Mr. Troy got on his feet, and, not very willingly, followed Isabel out of the room. "They will quarrel now, to a dead certainty," he thought to himself, as he closed the door. "Have you any idea of what this means?" he said to his companion, as he joined her in the hall. "What has Mr. Hardyman done to excite all this interest in him?"

Isabel's guilty color rose. She knew perfectly well that Hardyman's unconcealed admiration of her was the guiding motive of Lady Lydiard's inquiries. If she had told the truth, Mr. Troy would have unquestionably returned to the drawing-room, with or without an acceptable excuse for intruding himself. But Isabel was a woman; and her answer, it is needless to say, was, "I don't know, I'm sure."

In the meantime the interview between the two ladies began in a manner which would have astonished Mr. Troy—they were both silent. For once in her life, Lady Lydiard was considering what she should say, before she said it. Miss Pink, on her side, naturally waited to hear what object her ladyship had in view—waited until her small reserves of patience gave way. Urged by irresistible curiosity, she spoke first.

"Have you anything to say to me in private?" she asked.

Lady Lydiard had not got to the end of her reflections. She said "Yes," and she said no more.

"Is it anything relating to my niece?" persisted Miss Pink.

Still immersed in her reflections, Lady Lydiard suddenly rose to the surface, and spoke her mind, as usual.

"About your niece, ma'am. The other day Mr. Hardyman called at my house, and saw Isabel."

"Yes," said Miss Pink, politely attentive, but not in the least interested, so far.

"That's not all, ma'am. Mr. Hardyman admires Isabel; he owned it to me himself in so many words."

Miss Pink listened, with a courteous inclination of her head. She looked mildly gratified, nothing more. Lady Lydiard proceeded.

"You and I think differently on many matters," she said, "but we are both agreed, I am sure, in feeling the sincerest interest in Isabel's welfare. I beg to suggest to you, Miss Pink, that Mr. Hardyman, as a near neighbor of yours, is a very undesirable neighbor while Isabel remains in your house."

Saying those words, under a strong conviction of the serious importance of the subject, Lady Lydiard insensibly recovered the manner and resumed the language which befitted a lady of her rank. Miss Pink, noticing the change, set it down to an expression of pride on the part of her visitor which, in referring to Isabel, assailed indirectly the social position of Isabel's aunt.

"I fail entirely to understand what your ladyship means," she said, coldly.

Lady Lydiard, on her side, looked in undisguised amazement at Miss Pink.

"Haven't I told you already that Mr. Hardyman admires your niece?" she asked.

"Naturally," said Miss Pink. "Isabel inherits her lamented mother's personal advantages. If Mr. Hardyman admires her, Mr. Hardyman shows his good taste."

Lady Lydiard's eyes opened wider and wider in wonder. "My good lady," she exclaimed, "is it possible you don't know that when a man admires a woman he doesn't stop there? He falls in love with her (as the saying is) next."

"So I have heard," said Miss Pink.

"So you have *heard*?" repeated Lady Lydiard. "If Mr. Hardyman finds his way to Isabel, I can tell you what you will *see*. Catch the two together, ma'am, and you will see Mr. Hardyman making love to your niece."

"Under due restrictions, Lady Lydiard, and with my permission first obtained, of course, I see no objection to Mr. Hardyman paying his addresses to Isabel."

"The woman is mad!" cried Lady Lydiard. "Do you actually suppose, Miss Pink, that Alfred Hardyman could by any earthly possibility marry your niece?"

Not even Miss Pink's politeness could submit to such a question as this. She rose indignantly from her chair. "Are you aware, Lady Lydiard, that the doubt you have just expressed is an insult to my niece and an insult to Me?"

"Are *you* aware of who Mr. Hardyman really is?" retorted her ladyship. "Or do you judge of his position by the vocation in life which he has perversely chosen to adopt? I can tell you, if you do, that Alfred Hardyman is the younger son of one of the oldest barons in the English peerage, and that his mother is related by marriage to the royal family of Würtemberg."

Miss Pink received the full shock of this information without receding from her position by a hair's-breadth.

"An English gentlewoman offers a fit alliance to any man living who seeks her hand in marriage," said Miss Pink. "Isabel's mother (you may not be aware of it) was the daughter of an English clergyman—"

"And Isabel's father was a chemist in a country town," added Lady Lydiard.

"Isabel's father," rejoined Miss Pink, "was attached in a most responsible capacity to the useful and honorable profession of Medicine. Isabel is, in the strictest sense of the word, a young gentlewoman. If you contradict that for a single instant, Lady Lydiard, you will oblige me to leave the room."

Those last words produced a result which Miss Pink had not anticipated—they roused Lady Lydiard to assert herself. As usual in such cases, she rose superior to her own eccentricity. Confronting

Miss Pink, she now spoke and looked with the gracious courtesy and the unassuming self-confidence of the order to which she belonged.

"For Isabel's own sake, and for the quieting of my conscience," she answered, "I will say one word more, Miss Pink, before I relieve you of my presence. Considering my age and my opportunities, I may claim to know quite as much as you do of the laws and customs which regulate society in our time. Without contesting your niece's social position, and without the slightest intention of insulting you, I repeat that the rank which Mr. Hardyman inherits makes it simply impossible for him even to think of marrying Isabel. You will do well not to give him any opportunities of meeting with her alone. And you will do better still (seeing that he is so near a neighbor of yours) if you permit Isabel to return to my protection, for a time at least. I will wait to hear from you when you have thought the matter over at your leisure. In the meantime, if I have inadvertently offended you, I ask your pardon—and I wish you good-evening."

She bowed, and walked to the door. Miss Pink, as resolute as ever in maintaining her pretensions, made an effort to match the great lady on her own ground.

"Before you go, Lady Lydiard, I beg to apologize if I have spoken too warmly on my side," she said. "Permit me to send for your carriage."

"Thank you, Miss Pink. My carriage is only at the village inn. I shall enjoy a little walk in the cool evening air. Mr. Troy, I have no doubt, will give me his arm." She bowed once more, and quietly left the room.

Reaching the little back garden of the villa through an open door at the farther end of the hall, Lady Lydiard found Tommie rolling luxuriously on Miss Pink's flower-beds, and Isabel and Mr. Troy in close consultation on the gravel walk. She spoke to the lawyer first.

"They are baiting the horses at the inn," she said. "I want your arm, Mr. Troy, as far as the village, and, in return, I will take you back to London with me. I have to ask your advice about one or two little matters, and this is a good opportunity."

"With the greatest pleasure, Lady Lydiard. I suppose I must say good-bye to Miss Pink?"

"A word of advice to you, Mr. Troy. Take care how you ruffle Miss Pink's sense of her own importance. Another word for your private ear—Miss Pink is a fool!"

On the lawyer's withdrawal, Lady Lydiard put her arm fondly round Isabel's waist. "What were you and Mr. Troy so busy in talking about?" she asked.

"We were talking, my lady, about tracing the person who stole the money," Isabel answered, rather sadly. "It seems a far more difficult matter than I supposed it to be. I try not to lose patience and hope, but it is a little hard to feel that the appearances are against me, and to wait day after day in vain for the discovery that is to set me right."

"You are a dear good child," said Lady Lydiard, "and you are more precious to me than ever. Don't despair, Isabel. With Mr. Troy's means of inquiring, and with my means of paying, the discovery of the thief cannot be much longer delayed. If you don't return to me soon, I shall come back and see you again. Your aunt hates the sight of me; but I don't care two straws for that," remarked her ladyship, showing the undignified side of her character once more. "Listen to me, Isabel. I have no wish to lower your aunt in your estimation, but I feel far more confidence in your good sense than in hers. Mr. Hardyman's business has taken him to France for the present. It is at least possible that you may meet with him on his return. If you do, keep him at a distance, my dear—politely, of course. There! there! you'd needn't turn red; I am not blaming you; I am only giving you a little good advice. In your position you cannot possibly be too careful. Here is Mr. Troy. You must come to the gate with us, Isabel, or we shall never get Tommie away from you. I am only his second favorite; you have the first place in his affections. God bless and prosper you, my child! I wish to Heaven you were going back to London with me! Well, Mr. Troy, how have you done with Miss Pink? Have you offended that terrible 'gentlewoman' (hateful word!), or has it been all the other way, and has she given you a kiss at parting?"

Mr. Troy smiled mysteriously, and changed the subject. His brief parting interview with the lady of the house was not of a nature to be rashly related. Miss Pink had not only positively assured him that her visitor was the most ill-bred woman she had ever met with, but had further accused Lady Lydiard of shaking her confidence in the aristocracy of her native country. "For the first time in my life," said Miss Pink, "I feel that something is to be said for the republican point of view; and I am not indisposed to admit that the constitution of the United States *has* its advantages."

CHAPTER XII.

THE conference between Lady Lydiard and Mr. Troy, on the way back to London, led to some practical results.

Hearing from her legal adviser that the inquiry after the missing money was for the moment at a standstill, Lady Lydiard made one

of those bold suggestions with which she was accustomed to startle her friends in cases of emergency. She had heard favorable reports of the extraordinary ingenuity of the French police, and she now proposed sending to Paris for assistance, after first consulting her nephew, Mr. Felix Sweetsir. "Felix knows Paris as well as he knows London," she remarked. "He is an idle man, and it is quite likely that he will relieve us of all trouble by taking the matter into his own hands. In any case, he is sure to know who are the right people to address in our present necessity. What do you say?"

Mr. Troy, in reply, expressed his doubts as to the wisdom of employing foreigners in a delicate investigation which required an accurate knowledge of English customs and English character. Waiving this objection, he approved of the idea of consulting her ladyship's nephew. "Mr. Sweetsir is a man of the world," he said. "In putting the case before him, we are sure to have it presented to us from a new point of view." Acting on this favorable expression of opinion, Lady Lydiard wrote to her nephew. On the day after the visit to Miss Pink the proposed council of three was held at Lady Lydiard's house.

Felix, never punctual in keeping an appointment, was even later than usual on this occasion. He made his apologies with his hand pressed on his forehead, and his voice expressive of the languor and discouragement of a suffering man.

"The beastly English climate is telling on my nerves," said Mr. Sweetsir; "the horrid weight of the atmosphere, after the exhilarating air of Paris; the intolerable dirt and dulness of London, you know. I was in bed, my dear aunt, when I received your letter. You may imagine the completely demoralized state I was in, when I tell you of the effect which the news of the robbery produced on me. I fell back on my pillow as if I had been shot. Your ladyship should really be a little more careful in communicating these disagreeable surprises to a sensitively organized man. Never mind, my valet is a perfect treasure; he brought me some drops of ether on a lump of sugar. I said, 'Alfred' (his name is Alfred), 'put me into my clothes.' Alfred put me in. I assure you it reminded me of my young days, when I was put into my first pair of trousers. Has Alfred forgotten anything? Have I got my braces on? Have I come out in my shirt-sleeves? Well, dear aunt! well, Mr. Troy! what can I say? what can I do?"

Lady Lydiard, entirely without sympathy for nervous suffering, nodded to the lawyer. "You tell him," she said.

"I believe I speak for her ladyship," Mr. Troy began, "when I say that we should like to hear, in the first place, how the whole case strikes you, Mr. Sweetsir."

"Tell it me all over again," said Felix.

Patient Mr. Troy told it all over again, and waited for the result.

"Well?" said Felix.

"Well?" said Mr. Troy. "Where does the suspicion of robbery rest, in your opinion? You look at the theft of the bank-note with a fresh eye."

"You mentioned a clergyman just now," said Felix. "The man, you know, to whom the money was sent. What was his name?"

"The Reverend Samuel Bradstock."

"You want me to name the person whom I suspect?"

"Yes, if you please," said Mr. Troy.

"I suspect the Reverend Samuel Bradstock," said Felix.

"If you have come here to make stupid jokes," interposed Lady Lydiard, "you had better go back to your bed again. We want a serious opinion."

"You *have* a serious opinion," Felix coolly rejoined. "I never was more in earnest in my life. Your ladyship is not aware of the first principle to be adopted in cases of suspicion. One proceeds on what I will call the exhaustive system of reasoning. Thus: Does suspicion point to the honest servants down-stairs? No. To your ladyship's adopted daughter? Appearances are against the poor girl; but you know her better than to trust to appearances. Are you suspicious of Moody? No. Of Hardyman, who was in the house at the time? Ridiculous! But I was in the house at the time too. Do you suspect me? Just so! That idea is ridiculous too. Now let us sum up. Servants, adopted daughter, Moody, Hardyman, Sweetsir—all beyond suspicion. Who is left? The Reverend Samuel Bradstock!"

This ingenious exposition of "the exhaustive system of reasoning" failed to produce any effect on Lady Lydiard. "You are wasting our time," she said, sharply. "You know as well as I do that you are talking nonsense."

"I don't," said Felix. "Taking the gentlemanly professions all round, I know of no men who are so eager to get money, and who have so few scruples about how they get it, as the parsons. Where is there a man in any other profession who perpetually worries you for money? who holds the bag under your nose for money? who sends his clerk round from door to door to beg a few shillings of you, and calls it an 'Easter offering'? The parson does all this. Bradstock is a parson. I put it logically. Bowl me over if you can."

Mr. Troy attempted to "bowl him over," nevertheless. Lady Lydiard wisely interposed.

"When a man persists in talking nonsense," she said, "silence is the best answer; anything else only encourages him." She turned

to Felix. "I have a question to ask you," she went on. "You will either give me a serious reply, or wish me good-morning." With this brief preface, she made her inquiry as to the wisdom and possibility of engaging the services of the French police.

Felix took exactly the view of the matter which had been already expressed by Mr. Troy. "Superior in intelligence," he said, "but not superior in courage, to the English police. Capable of performing wonders on their own ground and among their own people. But, my dear aunt, the two most dissimilar nations on the face of the earth are the English and the French. The French police may speak our language, but they are incapable of understanding our national character and our national manners. Set them to work on a private inquiry in the city of Pekin, and they would get on in time with the Chinese people. Set them to work in the city of London, and the English people would remain, from first to last, the same impenetrable mystery to them. In my belief, the London Sunday would be enough of itself to drive them back to Paris in despair. No balls, no concerts, no theatres, not even a museum or a picture-gallery open; every shop shut up but the gin-shop, and nothing moving but the church-bells and the men who sell the penny ices. Hundreds of Frenchmen come to see me on their first arrival in England. Every man of them rushes back to Paris on the second Saturday of his visit, rather than confront the horrors of a second Sunday in London. However, you can try it, if you like. Send me a written abstract of the case, and I will forward it to one of the official people in the Rue Jérusalem, who will do anything he can to oblige me. Of course," said Felix, turning to Mr. Troy, "some of you have got the number of the lost bank-note. If the thief has tried to pass it in Paris, my man may be of some use to you."

"Three of us have got the number of the note," answered Mr. Troy, "Miss Isabel Miller, Mr. Moody, and myself."

"Very good," said Felix. "Send me the number, with the abstract of the case. Is there anything else I can do towards recovering the money?" he asked, turning to his aunt. "There is one lucky circumstance in connection with this loss, isn't there? It has fallen on a person who is rich enough to take it easy. Good heavens! suppose it had been *my* loss!"

"It has fallen doubly on me," said Lady Lydiard; "and I am certainly not rich enough to take *that* easy. The money was destined to a charitable purpose, and I have felt it my duty to pay it again."

Felix rose and approached his aunt's chair with faltering steps, as became a suffering man. He took Lady Lydiard's hand and kissed it with enthusiastic admiration.

"You excellent creature!" he said. "You may not think it, but you reconcile me to human nature. How generous! how noble! I think I'll go to bed again, Mr. Troy, if you really don't want any more of me. My head feels giddy, and my legs tremble under me. It doesn't matter; I shall feel easier when Alfred has taken me out of my clothes again. God bless you, my dear aunt! I never felt so proud of being related to you as I do to-day. Good-morning, Mr. Troy. Don't forget the abstract of the case, and don't trouble yourself to see me to the door. I dare say I sha'n't tumble down-stairs, and if I do, there's the porter in the hall to pick me up again. Envious porter! as fat as butter, and as idle as a pig! *Au revoir! au revoir!*" He kissed his hand, and drifted feebly out of the room. Sweet-sir, one might say, in a state of eclipse; but still the serviceable Sweet-sir, who was never consulted in vain by the fortunate people privileged to call him friend.

"Is he really ill, do you think?" Mr. Troy asked.

"My nephew has turned fifty," Lady Lydiard answered, "and he persists in living as if he were a young man. Every now and then Nature says to him, 'Felix, you are old!' And Felix goes to bed, and says it's his nerves."

"I suppose he is to be trusted to keep his word about writing to Paris?" pursued the lawyer.

"Oh, yes. He may delay doing it, but he will do it. In spite of his lackadaisical manner, he has moments of energy that would surprise you. Talking of surprises, I have something to tell you about Moody. Within the last day or two there has been a marked change in him—a change for the worse."

"You astonish me, Lady Lydiard. In what way has Moody deteriorated?"

"You shall hear. Yesterday was Friday. You took him out with you, on business, early in the morning."

Mr. Troy bowed, and said nothing. He had not thought it desirable to mention the interview at which Old Sharon had cheated him of his guinea.

"In the course of the afternoon," pursued Lady Lydiard, "I happened to want him, and I was informed that Moody had gone out again. Where had he gone? Nobody knew. Had he left word when he would be back? He had left no message of any sort. Of course he is not in the position of an ordinary servant. I don't expect him to ask permission to go out, but I do expect him to leave word down-stairs of the time at which he is likely to return. When he did come back, after an absence of some hours, I naturally asked for an explanation. Would you believe it? he simply informed me that he had been away on business of his own, expressed no regret,

and offered no explanation—in short, spoke as if he were an independent gentleman. You may not think it, but I kept my temper. I merely remarked that I hoped it would not happen again. He made me a bow, and he said, “My business is not completed yet, my lady. I cannot guarantee that it may not call me away again at a moment’s notice.” What do you think of that? Nine people out of ten would have given him warning to leave their service. I begin to think I am a wonderful woman: I only pointed to the door. One does hear sometimes of men’s brains softening in the most unexpected manner. I have my suspicions of Moody’s brains, I can tell you.”

Mr. Troy’s suspicions took a different direction; they pointed along the line of streets which led to Old Sharon’s lodgings. Discreetly silent as to the turn which his thoughts had taken, he merely expressed himself as feeling too much surprised to offer any opinion at all.

“Wait a little,” said Lady Lydiard, “I haven’t done surprising you yet. You have seen a boy here in a page’s livery, I think. Well, he is a good boy, and he has gone home for a week’s holiday with his friends. The proper person to supply his place with the boots and shoes and other small employments is, of course, the youngest footman, a lad of only a few years older than himself. What do you think Moody does? Engages a stranger, with the house full of idle men-servants already, to fill the page’s place. At intervals this morning I heard them wonderfully merry in the servants’ hall—so merry that the noise and laughter found its way upstairs to the breakfast-room. I like my servants to be in good spirits, but it certainly did strike me that they were getting beyond reasonable limits. I questioned my maid, and was informed that the noise was all due to the jokes of the strangest old man that ever was seen. In other words, to the person whom my steward had taken it on himself to engage in the page’s absence. I spoke to Moody on the subject. He answered in an odd, confused way, that he had exercised his discretion to the best of his judgment, and that (if I wished it) he would tell the old man to keep his good spirits under better control. I asked him how he came to hear of the man. He only answered, ‘By accident, my lady;’ and not one word more could I get out of him, good or bad. Moody engages the servants, as you know; but on every other occasion he has invariably consulted me before an engagement was settled. I really don’t feel at all sure about this person who has been so strangely introduced into the house; he may be a drunkard or a thief. I wish you would speak to Moody yourself, Mr. Troy. Do you mind ringing the bell?”

Mr. Troy rose, as a matter of course, and rang the bell.

He was by this time, it is needless to say, convinced that Moody had not only gone back to consult Old Sharon on his own responsi-

bility, but, worse still, had taken the unwarrantable liberty of introducing him as a spy into the house. To communicate this explanation to Lady Lydiard would, in her present humor, be simply to produce the dismissal of the steward from her service. The only other alternative was to ask leave to interrogate Moody privately, and, after duly reproving him, to insist on the departure of Old Sharon as the one condition on which Mr. Troy would consent to keep Lady Lydiard in ignorance of the truth.

"I think I shall manage better with Moody if your ladyship will permit me to see him in private," the lawyer said. "Shall I go down-stairs and speak to him in his own room?"

"Why should you trouble yourself to do that?" said her ladyship. "See him here, and I will go into the boudoir."

As she made that reply the footman appeared at the drawing-room door.

"Send Moody here," said Lady Lydiard.

The footman's answer, delivered at that moment, assumed an importance which was not expressed in the footman's words. "My lady," he said, "Mr. Moody has gone out."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHILE the strange proceedings of the steward were the subject of conversation between Lady Lydiard and Mr. Troy, Moody was alone in his room, occupied in writing to Isabel. Being unwilling that any eyes but his own should see the address, he had himself posted his letter, the time that he had chosen for leaving the house proving, unfortunately, to be also the time proposed by her ladyship for his interview with the lawyer. In ten minutes after the footman had reported his absence, Moody returned. It was then too late to present himself in the drawing-room. In the interval Mr. Troy had taken his leave, and Moody's position had dropped a degree lower in Lady Lydiard's estimation.

Isabel received her letter by the next morning's post. If any justification of Mr. Troy's suspicions had been needed, the terms in which Moody wrote would have amply supplied it.

"DEAR ISABEL (I hope I may call you 'Isabel' without offending you in your present trouble),—I have a proposal to make, which, whether you accept it or not, I beg you will keep a secret from every living creature but ourselves. You will understand my request when I add that these lines relate to the matter of tracing the stolen bank-note.

"I have been privately in communication with a person in London

who is, as I believe, the one person competent to help us in gaining our end. He has already made many inquiries in private. With some of them I am acquainted; the rest he has thus far kept to himself. The person to whom I allude particularly wishes to have half an hour's private conversation with you—in my presence. I am bound to warn you that he is a very strange and very ugly old man, and I can only hope that you will look over his personal appearance in consideration of what he is likely to do for you.

"Can you conveniently meet us at the farther end of the row of villas in which your aunt lives, the day after to-morrow, at four o'clock? Let me have one line to say if you will keep the appointment, and if the hour named will suit you. And believe me your devoted friend and servant,
ROBERT MOODY."

The lawyer's warning to her to be careful how she yielded too readily to any proposal of Moody's recurred to Isabel's mind while she read those lines. Being pledged to secrecy, she could not consult Mr. Troy—she was left to decide for herself.

No obstacle stood in the way of her free choice of alternatives. After their early dinner at three o'clock, Miss Pink habitually retired to her own room "to meditate," as she expressed it. Her "meditations" invariably ended in a sound sleep of some hours; and during that interval Isabel was at liberty to do as she pleased. After considerable hesitation, her implicit belief in Moody's truth and devotion, assisted by a strong feeling of curiosity to see the companion with whom the steward had associated himself, decided Isabel on consenting to keep the appointment.

Taking up her position beyond the houses, on the day and at the hour mentioned by Moody, she believed herself to be fully prepared for the most unfavorable impression which the most disagreeable of all possible strangers could produce.

But the first appearance of Old Sharon—as dirty as ever, clothed in a long, frowzy, gray overcoat, with his pug-dog at his heels, and his smoke-blackened pipe in his mouth, with a tall white hat on his head, which looked as if it had been picked up in a gutter, a hideous leer in his eyes, and a jaunty trip in his walk—took her so completely by surprise that she could only return Moody's friendly greeting by silently pressing his hand. As for Moody's companion, to look at him for a second time was more than she had resolution to do. She kept her eyes fixed on the pug-dog, and with good reason; so far as appearances went, he was indisputably the nobler animal of the two.

Under the circumstances, the interview threatened to begin in a very embarrassing manner. Moody, disheartened by Isabel's silence,

made no attempt to set the conversation going; he looked as if he meditated a hasty retreat to the railway station which he had just left. Fortunately he had at his side the right man (for once) in the right place. Old Sharon's effrontery was equal to any emergency.

"I am not a nice-looking old man, my dear, am I?" he said, leering at Isabel with cunning, half-closed eyes. "Bless your heart! you'll soon get used to me. You see, I am the sort of color, as they say at the linen-draper's, that doesn't wash well. It's all through love; upon my life it is! Early in this present century I had my young affections blighted, and I've neglected myself ever since. Disappointment takes different forms, miss, in different men. I don't think I have had heart enough to brush my hair for the last fifty years. She was a magnificent woman, Mr. Moody, and she dropped me like a hot potato. Dreadful! dreadful! Let us pursue this painful subject no further. Ha! here's a pretty country! Here's a nice blue sky! I admire the country, miss; I see so little of it, you know. Have you any objection to walk along into the fields? The fields, my dear, bring out all the poetry of my nature. Where's the dog? Here, Puggy! Puggy! hunt about, my man, and find some dog-grass. Does his inside good, you know, after a meat diet in London. Lord! how I feel my spirits rising in this fine air! Does my complexion look any brighter, miss? Will you run a race with me, Mr. Moody, or will you oblige me with a back at leap-frog? I'm not mad, my dear young lady; I'm only merry. I live, you see, in the London stink, and the smell of the hedges and the wild flowers is too much for me at first. It gets into my head, it does. I'm drunk! As I live by bread, I'm drunk on fresh air! Oh! what a jolly day! Oh! how young and innocent I do feel!" Here his innocence got the better of him, and he began to sing, "'I wish I was a little fly, in my love's bosom for to lie!" Hullo! here we are on the nice soft grass! and, oh, my gracious! there's a bank running down into a hollow! I can't stand that, you know. Mr. Moody, hold my hat, and take the greatest care of it. Here goes for a roll down the bank!"

He handed his horrible hat to the astonished Moody, laid himself flat on the top of the bank, and deliberately rolled down it, exactly as he might have done when he was a boy. The tails of his long gray coat flew madly in the wind; the dog pursued him, jumping over him, and barking with delight; he shouted and screamed in answer to the dog, as he rolled over and over faster and faster; and when he got up on the level ground, and called out cheerfully to his companions standing above him, "I say, you two, I feel twenty years younger already!" human gravity could hold out no longer. The sad and silent Moody smiled, and Isabel burst into fits of laughter.

"There," he said, "didn't I tell you you would get used to me, miss? There's a great deal of life left in the old man yet—isn't there? Shy me down my hat, Mr. Moody. And now we'll get to business!" He turned round to the dog still barking at his heels. "Business, Puggy!" he called out, sharply, and Puggy instantly shut his mouth, and said no more.

"Well, now," Old Sharon resumed, when he had joined his friends and had got his breath again, "let's have a little talk about yourself, miss. Has Mr. Moody told you who I am, and what I want with you? Very good. May I offer you my arm? No! You like to be independent, don't you? All right—I don't object. I am an amiable old man, I am. About this Lady Lydiard, now? Suppose you tell me how you first got acquainted with her."

In some surprise at this question, Isabel told her little story. Observing Sharon's face while she was speaking, Moody saw that he was not paying the smallest attention to the narrative. His sharp, shameless black eyes watched the girl's face absently; his gross lips curled upward in a sardonic and self-satisfied smile. He was evidently setting a trap for her of some kind. Without a word of warning—while Isabel was in the middle of a sentence—the trap opened, with the opening of Old Sharon's lips.

"I say!" he burst out, "how came *you* to seal her ladyship's letter—eh?"

The question bore no sort of relation, direct or indirect, to what Isabel happened to be saying at the moment. In the sudden surprise of hearing it, she started and fixed her eyes in astonishment on Sharon's face. The old vagabond chuckled to himself. "Did you see that?" he whispered to Moody. "I beg your pardon, miss," he went on; "I won't interrupt you again. Lord, how interesting it is!—ain't it, Mr. Moody? Please to go on, miss."

But Isabel, though she spoke with perfect sweetness and temper, declined to go on. "I had better tell you, sir, how I came to seal her ladyship's letter," she said. "If I may venture on giving my opinion, *that* part of my story seems to be the only part of it which relates to your business with me to-day."

Without further preface she described the circumstances which had led to her assuming the perilous responsibility of sealing the letter. Old Sharon's wandering attention began to wander again; he was evidently occupied in setting another trap. For the second time he interrupted Isabel in the middle of a sentence. Suddenly stopping short, he pointed to some sheep at the farther end of the field through which they happened to be passing at the moment.

"There's a pretty sight!" he said. "There are the innocent sheep a-feeding—all following each other as usual; and there's the sly dog

waiting behind the gate till the sheep want his services. Reminds me of Old Sharon and the public." He chuckled over his discovery of the remarkable similarity between the sheep-dog and himself, and the sheep and the public, and then burst upon Isabel with a second question. "I say! didn't you look at the letter before you sealed it?"

"Certainly not," Isabel answered.

"Not even at the address?"

"No."

"Thinking of something else—eh?"

"Very likely," said Isabel.

"Was it your new bonnet, my dear?"

Isabel laughed. "Women are not always thinking of their new bonnets," she answered.

Old Sharon, to all appearance, dropped the subject there. He lifted his lean, brown forefinger and pointed again, this time to a house at a short distance from them. "That's a farmhouse, surely," he said. "I'm thirsty, after my roll down the hill. Do you think, miss, they would give me a drink of milk?"

"I am sure they would," said Isabel. I know the people. Shall I go and ask them?"

"Thank you, my dear. One word more before you go. About the sealing of that letter: what *could* you have been thinking of while you were doing it?" He looked hard at her, and took her suddenly by the arm. "Was it your sweetheart?" he asked, in a whisper.

The question instantly reminded Isabel that she had been thinking of Hardyman while she sealed the letter. She blushed as the remembrance crossed her mind. Robert, noticing her embarrassment, spoke sharply to Old Sharon. "You have no right to put such a question to a young lady," he said. "Be a little more careful for the future."

"There! there! don't be hard on me," pleaded the old rogue. "An ugly old man like me may make his innocent little joke—eh; miss? I'm sure you're too sweet-tempered to be angry when I meant no offence. Show me that you bear no malice. Go, like a forgiving young angel, and ask for the milk."

Nobody appealed to Isabel's sweetness of temper in vain. "I will do it with pleasure," she said, and hastened away to the farmhouse.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE instant Isabel was out of hearing, Old Sharon slapped Moody on the shoulder to rouse his attention. "I've got her out of the

way," he said; "now listen to me. My business with the young angel is done; I may go back to London."

Moody looked at him in astonishment.

"Lord! how little you know of thieves!" exclaimed Old Sharon.

"Why, man alive, I have tried her with two plain tests. If you wanted a proof of her innocence, there it was, as plain as the nose on your face. Did you hear me ask her how she came to seal the letter, just when her mind was running on something else?"

"I heard you," said Moody.

"Did you see how she started and stared at me?"

"I did."

"Well, I can tell you this: if she *had* stolen the money, she would neither have started nor stared. She would have had her answer ready beforehand in her own mind, in case of accidents. There's only one thing, in my experience, that you can never do with a thief, when the thief happens to be a woman—you can never take her by surprise. Put that remark by in your mind; one day you may find a use for remembering it. Did you see her blush, and look quite hurt in her feelings, pretty dear, when I asked about her sweetheart? Do you think a thief, in her place, would have shown such a face as that? Not she! The thief would have been relieved. The thief would have said to herself, 'All right; the more the old fool talks about sweethearts, the further he is from tracing the robbery to me.' Yes! yes! the ground's cleared now, Master Moody. I've reckoned up the servants; I've questioned Miss Isabel; I've made my inquiries in all the other quarters that may be useful to us—and what's the result? The advice I gave, when you and the lawyer first came to me—I hate that fellow!—remains as sound and good advice as ever. I have got the thief in my mind," said Old Sharon, closing his cunning eyes and then opening them again, "as plain as I've got you in my eye at this minute. No more of that now," he went on, looking round sharply at the path that led to the farmhouse; "I've something particular to say to you, and there's barely time to say it before that nice girl comes back. Look here! do you happen to be acquainted with Mr. Honorable Hardyman's valet?"

Moody's eyes rested on Old Sharon with a searching and doubtful look.

"Mr. Hardyman's valet?" he repeated. "I wasn't prepared to hear Mr. Hardyman's name."

Old Sharon looked at Moody, in his turn, with a flash of sardonic triumph.

"Oho!" he said; "has my good boy learned his lesson? Do you see the thief through my spectacles already?"

"I began to see him," Moody answered, "when you gave us the guinea opinion at your lodgings."

"Will you whisper his name?" asked Old Sharon.

"Not yet. I distrust my own judgment. I'll wait till time proves that you're right."

Old Sharon knitted his shaggy brows and shook his head. "If you only had a little more dash and go in you," he said, "you would be a clever fellow. As it is—" He finished the sentence by snapping his fingers with a grin of contempt. "Let's get to business. Are you going back by the next train along with me, or are you going to stop with the young lady?"

"I will follow you by a later train," Moody answered.

"Then I must give you your instructions at once," Sharon continued. "You get better acquainted with Hardyman's valet. Lend him money if he wants it; stick at nothing to make a bosom-friend of him. I can't do that part of it; my appearance would be against me. *You* are the man; you are respectable from the top of your hat to the tips of your boots; nobody would suspect you. Don't make objections! Can you fix the valet? Or can't you?"

"I can try," said Moody. "And what then?"

Old Sharon put his gross lips disagreeably close to Moody's ear.

"Your friend the valet can tell you who his master's bankers are," he said; "and he can supply you with a specimen of his master's handwriting."

Moody drew back as suddenly as if his vagabond companion had put a knife at his throat. "You old villain!" he said; "are you tempting me to forgery?"

"You infernal fool!" retorted Old Sharon. "Will you hold that long tongue of yours, and hear what I have to say? You go to Hardyman's bankers, with a note in Hardyman's handwriting (exactly imitated by me) to this effect: 'Mr. H. presents his compliments to Messrs. So-and-So, and is not quite certain whether a payment of five hundred pounds has been made within the last week to his account. He will be much obliged if Messrs. So-and-So will inform him by a line in reply whether there is such an entry to his credit in their books, and by whom the payment has been made.' You wait for the bankers' answer, and bring it to me. It's just possible that the name you're afraid to whisper may appear in the letter. If it does, we've caught our man. Is *that* forgery, Mr. Muddlehead Moody? I'll tell you what—if I had lived to be your age, and knew no more of the world than you do, I'd go and hang myself. Steady! here's our charming friend with the milk. Remember your instructions, and don't lose heart if my notion of the payment to the bankers comes to nothing. I know what to do next, in that case—and,

what's more, I'll take all the risk and trouble on my own shoulders. O Lord! I'm afraid I shall be obliged to drink the milk, now it's come."

With this apprehension in his mind, he advanced to relieve Isabel of the jug she carried.

"Here's a treat!" he burst out, with an affectation of joy which was completely belied by the expression of his dirty face. "Here's a kind and dear young lady, to help an old man to a drink with her own pretty hands." He paused, and looked at the milk very much as he might have looked at a dose of physic. "Will any one take a drink first?" he asked, offering the jug piteously to Isabel and Moody. "You see, I'm not used to genuine milk; I'm used to chalk and water. I don't know what effect the unadulterated cow might have on my poor old inside." He tasted the milk with the greatest caution. "Upon my soul, this is too rich for me! The unadulterated cow is a deal too strong to be drunk alone. If you'll allow me, I'll qualify it with a drop of gin. Here, Puggy! Puggy!" He set the milk down before the dog, and taking a flask out of his pocket, emptied it at a draught. "That's something like!" he said, smacking his lips with an air of infinite relief. "So sorry, miss, to have given you all your trouble for nothing; it's my ignorance that's to blame, not me. I couldn't know I was unworthy of genuine milk till I tried—could I? And do you know," he proceeded, with his eye directed slyly on the way back to the station, "I begin to think I'm not worthy of the fresh air either. A kind of a longing seems to come over me for the London stink. I'm homesick already for the soot of my happy childhood and my own dear native mud. The air here is too thin for me, and the sky's too clean; and—O Lord!—when you're used to the roar of the traffic—the 'busses and the cabs and what not—the silence in these parts is downright awful. I'll wish you good-evening, miss, and get back to London."

Isabel turned to Moody with disappointment plainly expressed in her face and manner.

"Is that all he has to say?" she asked. "You told me he could help us. You led me to suppose he could find the guilty person."

Sharon heard her. "I could name the guilty person," he answered, "as easily, miss, as I could name you."

"Why don't you do it, then?" Isabel inquired, not very patiently.

"Because the time's not ripe for it yet, miss—that's one reason. Because, if I mentioned the thief's name, as things are now, you, Miss Isabel, would think me mad; and you would tell Mr. Moody I had cheated him out of his money—that's another reason. The matter's in train, if you will only wait a little longer."

"So you say," Isabel rejoined. "If you really could name the thief, I believe you would do it now."

She turned away with a frown on her pretty face. Old Sharon followed her. Even his coarse sensibilities appeared to feel the irresistible ascendancy of beauty and youth.

"I say!" he began, "we must part friends, you know, or I shall break my heart over it. They have got milk at the farmhouse. Do you think they have got pen, ink, and paper too?"

Isabel answered, without turning to look at him, "Of course they have."

"And a bit of sealing-wax?"

"I dare say."

Old Sharon laid his dirty claws on her shoulder, and forced her to face him as the best means of shaking them off.

"Come along!" he said. "I am going to pacify you with some information in writing."

"Why should you write it?" Isabel asked, suspiciously.

"Because I mean to make my own conditions, my dear, before I let you into the secret."

In ten minutes more they were all three in the farmhouse parlor. Nobody but the farmer's wife was at home. The good woman trembled from head to foot at the sight of Old Sharon. In all her harmless life she had never yet seen humanity under the aspect in which it was now presented to her. "Mercy preserve us, miss!" she whispered to Isabel, "how come you to be in such company as *that*?" Instructed by Isabel, she produced the necessary materials for writing and sealing, and, that done, she shrank away to the door. "Please to excuse me, miss," she said, with a last horrified look at her venerable visitor; "I really can't stand the sight of such a blot of dirt as that in my nice clean parlor." With those words she disappeared, and was seen no more.

Perfectly indifferent to his reception, Old Sharon wrote, enclosed what he had written in an envelope, and sealed it (in the absence of anything better fitted for his purpose) with the mouthpiece of his pipe.

"Now, miss," he said, "you give me your word of honor"—he stopped and looked round at Moody, with a grin—"and you give me yours, that you won't either of you break the seal on this envelope till the expiration of one week from the present day. There are the conditions, Miss Isabel, on which I'll give you your information. If you stop to dispute with me, the candle's alight, and I'll burn the letter."

It was useless to contend with him. Isabel and Moody gave him the promise that he required. He handed the sealed envelope to Isabel with a low bow. "When the week's out," he said, "you will

own I'm a cleverer fellow than you think me now. Wish you good-evening, miss. Come along, Puggy! Farewell to the horrid, clean country, and back again to the nice London stink!"

• He nodded to Moody—he leered at Isabel—he chuckled to himself—he left the farmhouse.

CHAPTER XV.

ISABEL looked down at the letter in her hand, considered it in silence, and turned to Moody. "I feel tempted to open it already," she said.

"After giving your promise?" Moody gently remonstrated.

Isabel met that objection with a woman's logic.

"Does a promise matter," she asked, "when one gives it to a dirty, disreputable, presuming old wretch like Mr. Sharon? It's a wonder to me that you trust such a creature. I wouldn't!"

"I doubted him just as you do," Moody answered, "when I first saw him in company with Mr. Troy. But there was something in the advice he gave us at that first consultation which altered my opinion of him for the better. I dislike his appearance and his manners as much as you do—I may even say I felt ashamed of bringing such a person to see you. And yet I can't think that I have acted unwisely in employing Mr. Sharon."

Isabel listened absently. She had something more to say, and she was considering how she should say it. "May I ask you a bold question?" she began.

"Any question you like."

"Have you—" She hesitated and looked embarrassed. "Have you paid Mr. Sharon much money?" she resumed, suddenly rallying her courage. Instead of answering, Moody suggested that it was time to think of returning to Miss Pink's villa. "Your aunt may be getting anxious about you," he said.

Isabel led the way out of the farmhouse in silence. She reverted to Mr. Sharon and the money, however, as they returned by the path across the fields.

"I am sure you will not be offended with me," she said, gently, "if I own that I am uneasy about the expenses. I am allowing you to use your purse as if it were mine, and I have hardly any savings of my own."

Moody entreated her not to speak of it. "How can I put my money to a better use than in serving your interests?" he asked. "My one object in life is to relieve you of your present anxieties. I shall be the happiest man living if you only owe a moment's happiness to my exertions."

Isabel took his hand, and looked at him with grateful tears in her eyes.

"How good you are to me, Mr. Moody!" she said. "I wish I could tell you how deeply I feel your kindness."

"You can do it easily," he answered, with a smile. "Call me 'Robert,' don't call me 'Mr. Moody.'"

She took his arm with a sudden familiarity that charmed him. "If you had been my brother I should have called you 'Robert,'" she said; "and no brother could have been more devoted to me than you are."

He looked eagerly at her bright face turned up to his. "May I never hope to be something nearer and dearer to you than a brother?" he asked, timidly.

She hung her head and said nothing. Moody's memory recalled Sharon's coarse reference to her "sweetheart." She had blushed when he put the question. What had she done when Moody put ~~his~~ question? Her face answered for her—she had turned pale; she was looking more serious than usual. Ignorant as he was of the ways of women, his instinct told him that this was a bad sign. Surely her rising color would have confessed it, if time and gratitude together were teaching her to love him? He sighed as the inevitable conclusion forced itself on his mind.

"I hope I have not offended you?" he said, sadly.

"Oh, no."

"I wish I had not spoken. Pray don't think that I am serving you with any selfish motive."

"I don't think that, Robert. I never could think it of *you*."

He was not quite satisfied yet. "Even if you were to marry some other man," he went on, earnestly, "it would make no difference in what I am trying to do for you. No matter what I might suffer, I should still go on—for your sake."

"Why do you talk so?" she burst out, passionately. "No other man has such a claim as yours to my gratitude and regard. How can you let such thoughts come to you? I have done nothing in secret. I have no friends who are not known to you. Be satisfied with that, Robert, and let us drop the subject."

"Never to take it up again?" he asked, with the infatuated pertinacity of a man clinging to his last hope.

At other times and under other circumstances Isabel might have answered him sharply. She spoke with perfect gentleness now.

"Not for the present," she said. "I don't know my own heart. Give me time."

His gratitude caught at those words, as the drowning man is said to catch at the proverbial straw. He lifted her hand, and suddenly

and fondly pressed his lips on it. She showed no confusion. Was she sorry for him, poor wretch!—and was that all?

They walked on arm in arm, in silence.

Crossing the last field, they entered again on the high-road leading to the row of villas in which Miss Pink lived. The minds of both were preoccupied. Neither of them noticed a gentleman approaching on horseback, followed by a mounted groom. He was advancing slowly, at the walking pace of his horse, and he only observed the two foot-passengers when he was close to them.

“Miss Isabel!”

She started, looked up, and discovered—Alfred Hardyman.

He was dressed in a perfectly made travelling suit of light brown, with a peaked felt hat of a darker shade of the same color, which, in a picturesque sense, greatly improved his personal appearance. His pleasure at discovering Isabel gave the animation to his features which they wanted on ordinary occasions. He sat his horse, a superb hunter, easily and gracefully. His light, amber-colored gloves fitted him perfectly. His obedient servant, on another magnificent horse, waited behind him. He looked the impersonation of rank and breeding, of wealth and prosperity. What a contrast, in a woman's eyes, to the shy, pale, melancholy man in the ill-fitting black clothes, with the wandering, uneasy glances, who stood beneath him, and felt, and showed that he felt, his inferior position keenly! In spite of herself, the treacherous blush flew over Isabel's face, in Moody's presence, and with Moody's eyes distrustfully watching her.

“This is a piece of good-fortune that I hardly hoped for,” said Hardyman, his cool, quiet, dreary way of speaking quickened, as usual, in Isabel's presence. “I only got back from France this morning, and I called on Lady Lydiard in the hope of seeing you. She was not at home, and you were in the country, and the servants didn't know the address. I could get nothing out of them, except that you were on a visit to a relation.” He looked at Moody while he was speaking. “Haven't I seen you before?” he said, carelessly. “Yes; at Lady Lydiard's. You're her steward, are you not? How d'ye do?” Moody, with his eyes on the ground, answered silently by a bow. Hardyman, perfectly indifferent whether Lady Lydiard's steward spoke or not, turned on his saddle, and looked admiringly at Isabel. “I begin to think my luck has turned at last,” he went on, with a smile. “I was jogging along to my farm, and despairing of ever seeing Miss Isabel again—and Miss Isabel herself meets me at the road-side! I wonder whether you are as glad to see me as I am to see you? You won't tell me, eh? May I ask you something else?—are you staying in our neighborhood?”

There was no alternative before Isabel but to answer this last ques-

tion. Hardyman had met her out walking, and had no doubt drawn the inevitable inference, although he was too polite to say so in plain words.

"Yes, sir," she answered, shyly; "I am staying in this neighborhood."

"And who is your relation?" Hardyman proceeded, in his easy, matter-of-course way. "Lady Lydiard told me, when I had the pleasure of meeting you at her house, that you had an aunt living in the country. I have a good memory, Miss Isabel, for anything that I hear about you. It's your aunt, isn't it? Yes? I know everybody about here. What is your aunt's name?"

Isabel, still resting her hand on Robert's arm, felt it tremble a little as Hardyman made this last inquiry. If she had been speaking to one of her equals, she would have known how to dispose of the question without directly answering it. But what could she say to the magnificent gentleman on the stately horse? He had only to send his servant into the village to ask who the young lady from London was staying with, and the answer, in a dozen mouths at least, would direct him to her aunt. She cast one appealing look at Moody, and pronounced the distinguished name of Miss Pink.

"Miss Pink?" Hardyman repeated. "Surely I know Miss Pink." (He had not the faintest remembrance of her.) "Where did I meet her last?" (He ran over in his memory the different local festivals at which strangers had been introduced to him.) "Was it at the archery meeting? or at the grammar-school, when the prizes were given? No? It must have been at the flower-show, then, surely?"

It *had* been at the flower-show. Isabel had heard it from Miss Pink fifty times at least, and was obliged to admit it now.

"I am quite ashamed of never having called," Hardyman proceeded. "The fact is, I have so much to do. I am a bad one at paying visits. Are you on your way home? Let me follow you and make my apologies personally to Miss Pink."

Moody looked at Isabel. It was only a momentary glance, but she perfectly understood it.

"I am afraid, sir, my aunt cannot have the honor of seeing you to-day," she said.

Hardyman was all compliance. He smiled, and patted his horse's neck. "To-morrow, then," he said. "My compliments, and I will call in the afternoon. Let me see; Miss Pink lives at—" He waited, as if he expected Isabel to assist his treacherous memory once more. She hesitated again. Hardyman looked round at his groom. The groom could find out the address, even if he did not happen to know it already. Besides, there was the little row of houses visible at the farther end of the road. Isabel pointed to the villas, as a nec-

essary concession to good manners, before the groom could anticipate her. "My aunt lives there, sir, at the house called The Lawn."

"Ah! to be sure," said Hardyman. "I oughtn't to have wanted reminding; but I have so many things to think of at the farm. And I am afraid I must be getting old; my memory isn't as good as it was. I am so glad to have seen you, Miss Isabel. You and your aunt must come and look at my horses. Do you like horses? Are you fond of riding? I have a quiet roan mare that is used to carrying ladies; she would be just the thing for you. Did I beg you to give my best compliments to your aunt? Yes? How well you are looking! our air here agrees with you. I hope I haven't kept you standing too long? I didn't think of it in the pleasure of meeting you. Good-bye, Miss Isabel—good-bye till to-morrow."

He took off his hat to Isabel, nodded to Moody, and pursued his way to the farm.

Isabel looked at her companion. His eyes were still on the ground. Pale, silent, motionless, he waited by her like a dog, until she gave the signal of walking on again towards the house.

"You are not angry with me for speaking to Mr. Hardyman?" she asked, anxiously.

He lifted his head at the sound of her voice. "Angry with you, my dear! Why should I be angry?"

"You seemed so changed, Robert, since we met Mr. Hardyman. I couldn't help speaking to him, could I?"

"Certainly not."

They moved on towards the villa. Isabel was still uneasy. There was something in Moody's silent submission to all that she said and all that she did which pained and humiliated her. "You're not jealous?" she said, smiling timidly.

He tried to speak lightly, on his side. "I have no time to be jealous while I have your affairs to look after," he answered.

She pressed his arm tenderly. "Never fear, Robert, that new friends will make me forget the best and dearest friend who is now at my side." She paused, and looked up at him with a compassionate fondness that was very pretty to see. "I can keep out of the way to-morrow, when Mr. Hardyman calls," she said. "It is my aunt he is coming to see, not me."

It was generously meant. But while her mind was only occupied with the present time, Moody's mind was looking into the future. He was learning the hard lesson of self-sacrifice already. "Do what you think right," he said, quietly; "don't think of me."

They reached the gate of the villa. He held out his hand to say good-bye.

"Won't you come in?" she asked. "Do come in."

"Not now, my dear. I must get back to London as soon as I can. There is some more work to be done for you, and the sooner I do it the better."

She heard his excuse without heeding it.

"You are not like yourself, Robert," she said. "Why is it? What are you thinking of?"

He was thinking of the bright blush that overspread her face when Hardyman first spoke to her; he was thinking of the invitation to her to see the stud farm, and to ride the roan mare; he was thinking of the utterly powerless position in which he stood towards Isabel and towards the highly born gentleman who admired her. But he kept his doubts and fears to himself. "The train won't wait for me," he said, and held out his hand once more.

She was not only perplexed, she was really distressed. "Don't take leave of me in that cold way!" she pleaded. Her eyes dropped before his, and her lips trembled a little. "Give me a kiss, Robert, at parting." She said those bold words softly and sadly, out of the depth of her pity for him. He started; his face brightened suddenly; his sinking hope rose again. In another moment the change came; in another moment he understood her. As he touched her cheek with his lips he turned pale again. "Don't quite forget me," he said, in low, faltering tones, and left her.

Miss Pink met Isabel in the hall. Refreshed by unbroken repose, the ex-schoolmistress was in the happiest frame of mind for the reception of her niece's news.

Informed that Moody had travelled to South Morden to personally report the progress of the inquiries, Miss Pink highly approved of him as a substitute for Mr. Troy. "Mr. Moody, as a banker's son, is a gentleman by birth," she remarked; "he has condescended in becoming Lady Lydiard's steward. What I saw of him, when he came here with you, prepossessed me in his favor. He has my confidence, Isabel, as well as yours; he is in every respect a superior person to Mr. Troy. Did you meet any friends, my dear, when you were out walking?"

The answer to this question produced a species of transformation in Miss Pink. The rapturous rank-worship of her nation feasted, so to speak, on Hardyman's message. She looked taller and younger than usual; she was all smiles and sweetness. "At last, Isabel, you have seen birth and breeding under their right aspect," she said. "In the society of Lady Lydiard you cannot possibly have formed correct ideas of the English aristocracy. Observe Mr. Hardyman when he does me the honor to call to-morrow, and you will see the difference."

"Mr. Hardyman is your visitor, aunt, not mine. I was going to ask you to let me remain up-stairs in my room."

Miss Pink was unaffectedly shocked. "This is what you learn at Lady Lydiard's," she observed. "No, Isabel, your absence would be a breach of good manners; I cannot possibly permit it. You will be present to receive our distinguished friend with me. And mind this," added Miss Pink, in her most impressive manner, "if Mr. Hardyman should by any chance ask why you have left Lady Lydiard, not one word about those disgraceful circumstances which connect you with the loss of the bank-note! I should sink into the earth if the smallest hint of what has really happened should reach Mr. Hardyman's ears. My child, I stand towards you in the place of your lamented mother. I have the right to command your silence on this horrible subject, and I do imperatively command it."

In these words foolish Miss Pink sowed the seed for the harvest of trouble that was soon to come.

CHAPTER XVI.

PAYING his court to the ex-schoolmistress on the next day, Hardyman made such excellent use of his opportunities that the visit to the stud farm took place on the day after. His own carriage was placed at the disposal of Isabel and her aunt, and his own sister was present to confer special distinction on the reception of Miss Pink.

In a country like England, which annually suspends the sitting of its legislature in honor of a horse-race, it is only natural and proper that the comfort of the horses should be the first object of consideration at a stud farm. Nine tenths of the land at Hardyman's farm were devoted, in one way or another, to the noble quadruped with the low forehead and the long nose. Poor humanity was satisfied with second-rate and third-rate accommodation. The ornamental grounds, very poorly laid out, were also very limited in extent; and as for the dwelling-house, it was literally a cottage. A parlor and a kitchen, a smoking-room, a bedroom, and a spare chamber for a friend, all scantily furnished, sufficed for the modest wants of the owner of the property. If you wished to feast your eyes on luxury, you went to the stables.

The stud farm being described, the introduction of Hardyman's sister follows in due course.

The Honorable Lavinia Hardyman was, as all persons in society know, married rather late in life to General Drumblade. It is saying a great deal, but it is not saying too much, to describe Mrs. Drumblade as the most mischievous woman of her age in all England.

Scandal was the breath of her life; to place people in false positions, to divulge secrets and destroy characters, to undermine friendships and aggravate enmities—these were the sources of enjoyment from which this dangerous woman drew the inexhaustible fund of good spirits that made her a brilliant light in the social sphere. She was one of the privileged sinners of modern society. The worst mischief that she could work was ascribed to her “exuberant vitality.” She had that ready familiarity of manner which is (in her class) so rarely discovered to be insolence in disguise. Her power of easy self-assertion found people ready to accept her on her own terms wherever she went. She was one of those big, overpowering women, with blunt manners, voluble tongues, and goggle eyes, who carry everything before them. The highest society modestly considered itself in danger of being dull in the absence of Mrs. Drumblade. Even Hardyman himself—who saw as little of her as possible, whose frankly straightforward nature recoiled by instinct from contact with his sister—could think of no fitter person to make Miss Pink’s reception agreeable to her while he was devoting his own attentions to her niece. Mrs. Drumblade accepted the position thus offered with the most amiable readiness. In her own private mind she placed an interpretation on her brother’s motives which did him the grossest injustice. She believed that Hardyman’s designs on Isabel contemplated the most profligate result. To assist this purpose, while the girl’s nearest relative was supposed to be taking care of her, was Mrs. Drumblade’s idea of “fun.” Her worst enemies admitted that the Honorable Lavinia had redeeming qualities, and owned that a keen sense of humor was one of her merits.

Was Miss Pink a likely person to resist the fascinations of Mrs. Drumblade? Alas for the ex-schoolmistress! before she had been five minutes at the farm Hardyman’s sister had fished for her, caught her, landed her. Poor Miss Pink!

Mrs. Drumblade could assume a grave dignity of manner when the occasion called for it. She was grave, she was dignified, when Hardyman performed the ceremonies of introduction. She would not say she was charmed to meet Miss Pink—the ordinary slang of society was not for Miss Pink’s ears—she would say she felt this introduction as a privilege. It was so seldom one met with persons of trained intellect in society. Mrs. Drumblade was already informed of Miss Pink’s earlier triumphs in the instruction of youth. Mrs. Drumblade had not been blessed with children herself; but she had nephews and nieces, and she was anxious about their education, especially the nieces. What a sweet, modest girl Miss Isabel was! The fondest wish she could form for her nieces would be that they should resemble Miss Isabel when they grew up. The question was

as to the best method of education. She would own that she had selfish motives in becoming acquainted with Miss Pink. They were at the farm, no doubt, to see Alfred's horses. Mrs. Drumblade did not understand horses; her interest was in the question of education. She might even confess that she had accepted Alfred's invitation in the hope of hearing Miss Pink's views. There would be opportunities, she trusted, for a little instructive conversation on that subject. It was, perhaps, ridiculous to talk, at her age, of feeling as if she were Miss Pink's pupil, and yet it exactly expressed the nature of the aspiration which was then in her mind. In these terms, feeling her way with the utmost nicety, Mrs. Drumblade wound the net of flattery round and round Miss Pink, until her hold on that innocent lady was, in every sense of the word, secure. Before half the horses had been passed under review Hardyman and Isabel were out of sight, and Mrs. Drumblade and Miss Pink were lost in the intricacies of the stables. "Excessively stupid of me! We had better go back, and establish ourselves comfortably in the parlor. When my brother misses us, he and your charming niece will return to look for us in the cottage." Under cover of this arrangement the separation became complete. Miss Pink held forth on education to Mrs. Drumblade in the parlor, while Hardyman and Isabel were on their way to a paddock at the farthest limits of the property.

"I am afraid you are getting a little tired," said Hardyman. "Won't you take my arm?"

Isabel was on her guard; she had not forgotten what Lady Lydiard had said to her. "No, thank you, Mr. Hardyman; I am a better walker than you think."

Hardyman continued the conversation in his blunt, resolute way. "I wonder whether you will believe me," he asked, "if I tell you that this is one of the happiest days of my life?"

"I should think you were always happy," Isabel cautiously replied, "having such a pretty place to live in as this."

Hardyman met that answer with one of his quietly positive denials. "A man is never happy by himself," he said. "He is happy with a companion. For instance, I am happy with you."

Isabel stopped and looked back. Hardyman's language was becoming a little too explicit. "Surely we have lost Mrs. Drumblade and my aunt?" she said. "I don't see them anywhere."

"You will see them directly; they are only a long way behind." With this assurance, he returned, in his own obstinate way, to his one object in view. "Miss Isabel, I want to ask you a question. I'm not a ladies' man. I speak my mind plainly to everybody—women included. Do you like being here to-day?"

Isabel's gravity was not proof against this very downright ques-

tion. "I should be hard to please," she said, laughing, "if I didn't enjoy my visit to the farm."

Hardyman pushed steadily forward through the obstacle of the farm to the question of the farm's master. "You like being here," he repeated. "Do you like me?"

This was serious. Isabel drew back a little and looked at him. He waited with the most impenetrable gravity for her reply.

"I think you can hardly expect me to answer that question," she said.

"Why not?"

"Our acquaintance has been a very short one, Mr. Hardyman. And if *you* are so good as to forget the difference between us, I think I ought to remember it."

"What difference?"

"The difference in rank."

Hardyman suddenly stood still, and emphasized his next words by digging his stick into the grass.

"If anything I have said has vexed you," he began, "tell me so plainly, Miss Isabel, and I'll ask your pardon. But don't throw my rank in my face. I cut adrift from all that nonsense when I took this farm and got my living out of the horses. What has a man's rank to do with a man's feelings?" he went on, with another emphatic dig of his stick. "I am quite serious in asking if you like me, for this good reason, that I like you. Yes, I do. You remember that day when I bled the old lady's dog. Well, I have found out since then that there's a sort of incompleteness in my life which I never suspected before. It's you who have put that idea into my head. You didn't mean it, I dare say, but you have done it all the same. I sat alone here yesterday evening smoking my pipe—and I didn't enjoy it. I breakfasted alone this morning—and I didn't enjoy *that*. I said to myself, She's coming to lunch, that's one comfort—I shall enjoy lunch. That's what I feel, roughly described. I don't suppose I've been five minutes together without thinking of you, now in one way and now in another, since the day when I first saw you. When a man comes to my time of life, and has had my experience, he knows what that means. It means, in plain English, that his heart is set on a woman. You're the woman."

Isabel had thus far made several attempts to interrupt him, without success. But when Hardyman's confession attained its culminating-point, she insisted on being heard.

"If you will excuse me, sir," she interposed, gravely, "I think I had better go back to the cottage. My aunt is a stranger here, and she doesn't know where to look for us."

"We don't want your aunt," Hardyman remarked, in his most positive manner.

"We do want her," Isabel rejoined. "I won't venture to say it's wrong in you, Mr. Hardyman, to talk to me as you have just done, but I am quite sure it's wrong in me to listen."

He looked at her with such unaffected surprise and distress that she stopped, on the point of leaving him, and tried to make herself better understood.

"I had no intention of offending you, sir," she said, a little confusedly. "I only wanted to remind you that there are some things which a gentleman in your position—" She stopped, tried to finish the sentence, failed, and began another. "If I had been a young lady in your own rank of life," she went on, "I might have thanked you for paying me a compliment, and have given you a serious answer. As it is, I am afraid I must say that you have surprised and disappointed me. I can claim very little for myself, I know; but I did imagine—so long as there was nothing unbecoming in my conduct—that I had some right to your respect."

Listening more and more impatiently, Hardyman took her by the hand, and burst out with another of his abrupt questions.

"What can you possibly be thinking of?" he asked.

She gave him no answer; she only looked at him reproachfully, and tried to release herself.

Hardyman held her hand faster than ever.

"I believe you think me an infernal scoundrel," he said. "I can stand a good deal, Miss Isabel, but I can't stand *that*. How have I failed in respect towards you, if you please? I have told you you're the woman my heart is set on. Well? Isn't it plain what I want of you when I say that? Isabel Miller, I want you to be my wife!"

Isabel's only reply to this extraordinary proposal of marriage was a faint cry of astonishment, followed by a sudden trembling that shook her from head to foot.

Hardyman put his arm round her with a gentleness which his oldest friend would have been surprised to see in him.

"Take your time to think of it," he said, dropping back again into his usual quiet tone. "If you had known me a little better, you wouldn't have mistaken me, and you wouldn't be looking at me now as if you were afraid to believe your own ears. What is there so very wonderful in my wanting to marry you? I don't set up for being a saint. When I was a young man I was no better (and no worse) than other young men. I'm getting on now to middle life. I don't want romances and adventures; I want an easy existence with a nice, lovable woman who will make me a good wife. You're the woman, I tell you again. I know it by what I've seen of

you myself, and by what I have heard of you from Lady Lydiard. She said you were prudent and sweet-tempered and affectionate; to which I wish to add that you have just the face and figure that I like, and the modest manners and the blessed absence of all slang in your talk which I don't find in the young women I meet with in the present day. That's my view of it: I think for myself. What does it matter to me whether you're the daughter of a duke or the daughter of a dairyman? It isn't your father I want to marry; it's you. Listen to reason, there's a dear! We have only one question to settle before we go back to your aunt. You wouldn't answer me when I asked it a little while since. Will you answer now? Do you like me?"

Isabel looked up at him timidly.

"In my position, sir," she asked, "have I any right to like you? What would your relations and friends think if I said Yes?"

Hardyman gave her waist a little admonitory squeeze with his arm.

"What! You're at it again? A nice way to answer a man, to call him 'sir,' and to get behind his rank as if it were a place of refuge from him! I hate talking of myself, but you force me to it. Here is my position in the world: I have got an elder brother; he is married and he has a son to succeed him in the title and the property. You understand, so far? Very well! Years ago I shifted my share of the rank (whatever it may be) on to my brother's shoulders. He's a thorough good fellow, and he has carried my dignity for me, without once dropping it, ever since. As for what people may say, they have said it already, from my father and mother downward, in the time when I took to the horses and the farm. If they're the wise people I take them for, they won't be at the trouble of saying it all over again. No, no. Twist it how you may, Miss Isabel, whether I'm single or whether I'm married, I'm plain Alfred Hardyman; and everybody who knows me knows that I go on my own way, and please myself. If you don't like me, it will be the bitterest disappointment I ever had in my life; but say so honestly, all the same."

Where is the woman in Isabel's place whose capacity for resistance would not have yielded a little to such an appeal as this?

"I should be an insensible wretch," she replied, warmly, "if I didn't feel the honor you have done me, and feel it gratefully."

"Does that mean you will have me for a husband?" asked downright Hardyman.

She was fairly driven into a corner; but (being a woman) she tried to slip through his fingers at the last moment.

"Will you forgive me," she said, "if I ask for a little more time? I am so bewildered, I hardly know what to say or do for the best."

You see, Mr. Hardyman, it would be a dreadful thing for me to be the cause of your giving offence to your family. I am obliged to think of that. It would be so distressing for you (I will say nothing of myself) if your friends closed their doors on me. They might say I was a designing girl, who had taken advantage of your good opinion to raise herself in the world. Lady Lydiard warned me long since not to be ambitious about myself, and not to forget my station in life, because she treated me like her adopted daughter. Indeed—indeed, I can't tell you how I feel your goodness, and the compliment—the very great compliment—you pay me. My heart is free; and if I followed my own inclinations—” She checked herself, conscious that she was on the brink of saying too much. “Will you give me a few days,” she pleaded, “to try if I can think composedly of all this? I am only a girl, and I feel quite dazzled by the prospect that you set before me.”

Hardyman seized on these words as offering all the encouragement that he desired to his suit.

“Have your own way in this thing, and in everything!” he said, with an unaccustomed fervor of language and manner. “I am so glad to hear that your heart is open to me, and that all your inclinations take my part.”

Isabel instantly protested against this misrepresentation of what she had really said. “Oh, Mr. Hardyman, you quite mistake me!”

He answered her very much as he had answered Lady Lydiard when she had tried to make him understand his proper relations towards Isabel.

“No, no; I don't mistake you. I agree to every word you say. How can I expect you to marry me, as you very properly remark, unless I give you a day or two to make up your mind? It's quite enough for me that you like the prospect. If Lady Lydiard treated you as her daughter, why shouldn't you be my wife? It stands to reason that you're quite right to marry a man who can raise you in the world. I like you to be ambitious, though Heaven knows it isn't much I can do for you, except to love you with all my heart. Still, it's a great encouragement to hear that her ladyship's views agree with mine—”

“They don't agree, Mr. Hardyman,” protested poor Isabel. “You are entirely misrepresenting—”

Hardyman cordially concurred in this view of the matter. “Yes! yes! I can't pretend to represent her ladyship's language, or yours either; I am obliged to take my words as they come to me. Don't disturb yourself: it's all right—I understand. You have made me the happiest man living. I shall ride over to-morrow to your aunt's house and hear what you have to say to me. Mind you're at home! Not a

day must pass now without my seeing you. I do love you, Isabel—I do indeed!" He stooped, and kissed her heartily. "Only to reward me," he explained, "for giving you time to think."

She drew herself away from him—resolutely, not angrily. Before she could make a third attempt to place the subject in its right light before him, the luncheon-bell rang at the cottage, and a servant appeared, evidently sent to look for them.

"Don't forget to-morrow," Hardyman whispered, confidentially "I'll call early, and then go on to London and get the ring."

CHAPTER XVII.

EVENTS succeeded each other rapidly after the memorable day, to Isabel, of the luncheon at the farm.

On the next day (the 9th of the month) Lady Lydiard sent for her steward, and requested him to explain his conduct in repeatedly leaving the house without assigning any reason for his absence. She did not dispute his claims to a freedom of action which would not be permitted to an ordinary servant. Her objection to his present course of proceeding related entirely to the mystery in which it was involved, and to the uncertainty in which the household was left as to the hour of his return. On those grounds she thought herself entitled to an explanation. Moody's habitual reserve—strengthened on this occasion by his dread of ridicule if his efforts to serve Isabel ended in failure—disinclined him to take Lady Lydiard into his confidence while his inquiries were still beset with obstacles and doubts. He respectfully entreated her ladyship to grant him a delay of a few weeks before he entered on his explanation. Lady Lydiard's quick temper resented this request. She told Moody plainly that he was guilty of an act of presumption in making his own conditions with his employer. He received the reproof with exemplary resignation, but he held to his conditions nevertheless. From that moment the result of the interview was no longer in doubt. Moody was directed to send in his accounts. The accounts having been examined, and found to be scrupulously correct, he declined accepting the balance of salary that was offered to him. The next day he left Lady Lydiard's service.

On the 10th of the month her ladyship received a letter from her nephew.

The health of Felix had not improved. He had made up his mind to go abroad again towards the end of the month. In the meantime he had written to his friend at Paris, and he had the pleasure of forwarding an answer. The letter enclosed announced that the lost five-hundred-pound note had been made the subject of careful inquiry in

Paris. It had not been traced. The French police offered to send to London one of their best men, well acquainted with the English language, if Lady Lydiard was desirous of employing him. He would be perfectly willing to act with an English officer in conducting the investigation, should it be thought necessary. Mr. Troy being consulted as to the expediency of accepting this proposal, objected to the pecuniary terms demanded as being extravagantly high. He suggested waiting a little before any reply was sent to Paris; and he engaged meanwhile to consult a London solicitor who had great experience in cases of theft, and whose advice might enable them to dispense entirely with the services of the French police.

Being now a free man again, Moody was able to follow his own inclinations in regard to the instructions which he had received from Old Sharon.

The course that had been recommended to him was repellent to the self-respect and the sense of delicacy which were among the inbred virtues of Moody's character. He shrank from forcing himself as a friend on Hardyman's valet; he recoiled from the idea of tempting the man to steal a specimen of his master's handwriting. After some consideration, he decided on applying to the agent who collected the rents at Hardyman's London chambers. Being an old acquaintance of Moody's, this person would certainly not hesitate to communicate the address of Hardyman's bankers, if he knew it. The experiment, tried under these favoring circumstances, proved perfectly successful. Moody proceeded to Sharon's lodgings the same day, with the address of the bankers in his pocket-book. The old vagabond, greatly amused by Moody's scruples, saw plainly enough that so long as he wrote the supposed letter from Hardyman in the third person, it mattered little what handwriting was employed, seeing that no signature would be necessary. The letter was at once composed, on the model which Sharon had already suggested to Moody, and a respectable messenger (so far as outward appearance went) was employed to take it to the bank. In half an hour the answer came back. It added one more to the difficulties which beset the inquiry after the lost money. No such sum as five hundred pounds had been paid, within the dates mentioned, to the credit of Hardyman's account.

Old Sharon was not in the least discomposed by this fresh check. "Give my love to the dear young lady," he said, with his customary impudence, "and tell her we are one degree nearer to finding the thief."

Moody looked at him, doubting whether he was in jest or in earnest.

"Must I squeeze a little more information into that thick head of

yours?" asked Sharon. With this question he produced a weekly newspaper, and pointed to a paragraph which reported, among the items of sporting news, Hardyman's recent visit to a sale of horses at a town in the north of France. "We know he didn't pay the bank-note in to his account," Sharon remarked. "What else did he do with it? Took it to pay for the horses that he bought in France! Do you see your way a little plainer now? Very good. Let's try next if the money holds out. Somebody must cross the Channel in search of the note. Which of us two is to sit in the steamboat with a white basin on his lap? Old Sharon, of course." He stopped to count the money still left out of the sum deposited by Moody to defray the cost of the inquiry. "All right!" he went on. "I've got enough to pay my expenses there and back. Don't stir out of London till you hear from me. I can't tell how soon I may want you. If there's any difficulty in tracing the note, your hand will have to go into your pocket again. Can't you get the lawyer to join you? Lord! how I should enjoy squandering *his* money! It's a downright disgrace to me to have only got one guinea out of him. I could tear my flesh off my bones when I think of it."

The same night Old Sharon started for France, by way of Dover and Calais.

Two days elapsed, and brought no news from Moody's agent. On the third day he received some information relating to Sharon—not from the man himself, but in a letter from Isabel Miller.

"For once, dear Robert" (she wrote), "my judgment has turned out to be sounder than yours. That hateful old man has confirmed my worst opinion of him. Pray have him punished. Take him before a magistrate and charge him with cheating you out of your money. I enclose the sealed letter which he gave me at the farmhouse. The week's time before I was to open it expired yesterday. Was there ever anything so impudent and so inhuman? I am too vexed and angry about the money you have wasted on this old wretch to write more.

"Yours, gratefully and affectionately,

ISABEL."

The letter in which Old Sharon had undertaken (by way of pacifying Isabel) to write the name of the thief, contained these lines:

"You are a charming girl, my dear; but you still want one thing to make you perfect, and that is a lesson in patience. I am proud and happy to teach you. The name of the thief remains, for the present, Mr. — (Blank)."

From Moody's point of view, there was but one thing to be said of this: it was just like Old Sharon! Isabel's letter was of infinitely

greater interest to him. He feasted his eyes on the words above the signature: she signed herself, "Yours, gratefully and affectionately." Did the last word mean that she was really beginning to be fond of him? After kissing the word, he wrote a comforting letter to her, in which he pledged himself to keep a watchful eye on Sharon, and to trust him with no more money until he had honestly earned it first.

A week passed. Moody (longing to see Isabel) still waited in vain for news from France. He had just decided to delay his visit to South Morden no longer, when the errand-boy employed by Sharon brought him this message: "The old 'un's at home, and waitin' to see yer."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHARON'S news was not of an encouraging character. He had met with serious difficulties, and had spent the last farthing of Moody's money in attempting to overcome them.

One discovery of importance he had certainly made. A horse withdrawn from the sale was the only horse that had met with Hardyman's approval. He had secured the animal at the high reserved price of twelve thousand francs—being four hundred and eighty pounds in English money—and he had paid with an English bank-note. The seller (a French horse-dealer resident in Brussels) had returned to Belgium immediately on completing the negotiation. Sharon had ascertained his address, and had written to him at Brussels, enclosing the number of the lost bank-note. In two days he had received an answer informing him that the horse-dealer had been called to England by the illness of a relative, and that he had hitherto failed to send any address to which his letters could be forwarded. Hearing this, and having exhausted his funds, Sharon had returned to London. It now rested with Moody to decide whether the course of the inquiry should follow the horse-dealer next. There was the cash-account, showing how the money had been spent. And there was Sharon, with his pipe in his mouth and his dog on his lap, waiting for orders.

Moody wisely took time to consider before he committed himself to a decision. In the meanwhile he ventured to recommend a new course of proceeding which Sharon's report had suggested to his mind.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we have taken the roundabout way of getting to our end in view, when the straight road lay before us. If Mr Hardyman has passed the stolen note, you know as well as I do that he has passed it innocently. Instead of wasting time

and money in trying to trace a stranger, why not tell Mr. Hardyman what has happened, and ask him to give us the number of the note? You can't think of everything, I know; but it does seem strange that this idea didn't occur to you before you went to France."

"Mr. Moody," said Old Sharon, "I shall have to cut your acquaintance. You are a man without faith; I don't like you. As if I hadn't thought of Hardyman weeks since!" he exclaimed, contemptuously. "Are you really soft enough to suppose that a gentleman in his position would talk about his money affairs to me? You know mighty little of him if you do. A fortnight since I sent one of my men (most respectably dressed) to hang about his farm, and see what information he could pick up. My man became painfully acquainted with the toe of a boot. It was thick, sir; and it was Hardyman's."

"I will run the risk of the boot," Moody replied, in his quiet way.

"And put the question to Hardyman?"

"Yes."

"Very good," said Sharon. "If you get your answer from his tongue instead of his boot, the case is at an end—unless I have made a complete mess of it. Look here, Moody! If you want to do me a good turn, tell the lawyer that the guinea opinion was the right one. Let him know that *he* was the fool, not you, when he buttoned up his pockets and refused to trust me. And, I say!" pursued Old Sharon, relapsing into his customary impudence, "you're in love, you know, with that nice girl. I like her myself. When you marry her, invite me to the wedding. I'll make a sacrifice: I'll brush my hair and wash my face in honor of the occasion."

Returning to his lodgings, Moody found two letters waiting on the table. One of them bore the South Morden postmark. He opened that letter first.

It was written by Miss Pink. The first lines contained an urgent entreaty to keep the circumstances connected with the loss of the five hundred pounds the strictest secret from every one in general, and from Hardyman in particular. The reasons assigned for making the strange request were next expressed in these terms: "My niece Isabel is, I am happy to inform you, engaged to be married to Mr. Hardyman. If the slightest hint reached him of her having been associated, no matter how cruelly and unjustly, with a suspicion of theft, the marriage would be broken off, and the result to herself and to everybody connected with her would be disgrace for the rest of our lives."

On the blank space at the foot of the page a few words were added in Isabel's writing: "Whatever changes there may be in my life, your place in my heart is one that no other person can fill: it is the

place of my dearest friend. Pray write and tell me that you are not distressed and not angry. My one anxiety is that you should remember what I have always told you about the state of my own feelings. My one wish is that you will still let me love you and value you as I might have loved and valued a brother."

The letter dropped from Moody's hand. Not a word, not even a sigh, passed his lips. In tearless silence he submitted to the pang that wrung him—in tearless silence he contemplated the wreck of his life.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE narrative returns to South Morden, and follows the events which attended Isabel's marriage engagement.

To say that Miss Pink, inflated by triumph, rose, morally speaking, from the earth, and floated among the clouds, is to indicate faintly the effect produced on the ex-schoolmistress when her niece first informed her of what had happened at the farm. Attacked on one side by her aunt and on the other by Hardyman, and feebly defended, at the best, by her own doubts and misgivings, Isabel ended in surrendering at discretion. Like thousands of other women in a similar position, she was in the last degree uncertain as to the state of her own heart. To what extent she was insensibly influenced by Hardyman's commanding position, in believing herself to be sincerely attached to him, it was beyond her power of self-examination to discover. He doubly dazzled her by his birth and by his celebrity. Not in England only, but throughout Europe, he was a recognized authority on his own subject. How could she—how could any woman—resist the influence of his steady mind, his firmness of purpose, his manly resolution to owe everything to himself and nothing to his rank, set off, as these attractive qualities were, by the outward and personal advantages which exercise an ascendancy of their own? Isabel was fascinated, and yet Isabel was not at ease. In her lonely moments she was troubled by regretful thoughts of Moody, which perplexed and irritated her. She had always behaved honestly to him; she had never encouraged him to hope that his love for her had the faintest prospect of being returned. Yet, knowing as she did that her conduct was blameless so far, there were nevertheless perverse sympathies in her which took his part. In the wakeful hours of the night there were whispering voices in her which said, Think of Moody! Had there been a growing kindness towards this good friend in her heart of which she was herself not aware? She tried to detect it—to weigh it for what it was really worth. But it lay too deep to be discovered and estimated, if it did really exist

—if it had any sounder origin than her own morbid fancy. In the broad light of day, in the little bustling duties of life, she forgot it again. She could think of what she ought to wear on the wedding-day; she could even try privately how her new signature, "Isabel Hardyman," would look when she had the right to use it. On the whole, it may be said that the time passed smoothly, with some occasional checks and drawbacks, which were the more easily endured seeing that they took their rise in Isabel's own conduct. Compliant as she was in general, there were two instances, among others, in which her resolution to take her own way was not to be overcome. She refused to write either to Moody or to Lady Lydiard informing them of her engagement; and she steadily disapproved of Miss Pink's policy of concealment in the matter of the robbery at Lady Lydiard's house. Her aunt could only secure her as a passive accomplice by stating family considerations in the strongest possible terms. "If the disgrace was confined to you, my dear, I might leave you to decide. But I am involved in it, as your nearest relative; and, what is more, even the sacred memories of your father and mother might feel the slur cast on them." This exaggerated language—like all exaggerated language, a mischievous weapon in the arsenal of weakness and prejudice—had its effect on Isabel. Reluctantly and sadly she consented to be silent.

Miss Pink wrote word of the engagement to Moody first, reserving to a later day the superior pleasure of informing Lady Lydiard of the very event which that audacious woman had declared to be impossible. To her aunt's surprise, just as she was about to close the envelope, Isabel stepped forward, and inconsistently requested leave to add a postscript to the very letter which she had refused to write! Miss Pink was not even permitted to see the postscript. Isabel secured the envelope the moment she laid down her pen, and retired to her room with a headache (which was heartache in disguise) for the rest of the day.

While the question of the marriage was still in debate, an event occurred which exercised a serious influence on Hardyman's future plans.

He received a letter from the Continent which claimed his immediate attention. One of the sovereigns of Europe had decided on making some radical changes in the mounting and equipment of a cavalry regiment, and he required the assistance of Hardyman in that important part of the contemplated reform which was connected with the choice and purchase of horses. Setting his own interests out of the question, Hardyman owed obligations to the kindness of his illustrious correspondent which made it impossible for him to send an excuse. In a fortnight's time, at the latest, it would be nec-

essary for him to leave England, and a month or more might elapse before it would be possible for him to return.

Under these circumstances, he proposed, in his own precipitate way, to hasten the date of the marriage. The necessary legal delay would permit the ceremony to be performed on that day fortnight. Isabel might then accompany him on his journey, and spend a brilliant honeymoon at the foreign court. She at once refused not only to accept this proposal, but even to take it into consideration. While Miss Pink dwelt eloquently on the shortness of the notice, Miss Pink's niece based her resolution on far more important grounds. Hardyman had not yet announced the contemplated marriage to his parents and friends, and Isabel was determined not to become his wife until she could be first assured of a courteous and tolerant reception by the family, if she could hope for no warmer welcome at their hands.

Hardyman was not a man who yielded easily, even in trifles. In the present case his dearest interests were concerned in inducing Isabel to reconsider her decision. He was still vainly trying to shake her resolution when the afternoon post brought a letter for Miss Pink, which introduced a new element of disturbance into the discussion. The letter was nothing less than Lady Lydiard's reply to the written announcement of Isabel's engagement, despatched on the previous day by Miss Pink.

Her ladyship's answer was a surprisingly short one. It only contained these lines:

"Lady Lydiard begs to acknowledge the receipt of Miss Pink's letter requesting that she will say nothing to Mr. Hardyman of the loss of a bank-note in her house, and assigning as a reason that Miss Isabel Miller is engaged to be married to Mr. Hardyman, and might be prejudiced in his estimation if the facts were made known. Miss Pink may make her mind easy. Lady Lydiard has not the slightest intention of taking Mr. Hardyman into her confidence on the subject of her domestic affairs. With regard to the proposed marriage, Lady Lydiard casts no doubt on Miss Pink's perfect sincerity and good faith; but, at the same time, she positively declines to believe that Mr. Hardyman means to make Miss Isabel Miller his wife. Lady L. will yield to the evidence of a properly attested certificate—and to nothing else."

A folded piece of paper, directed to Isabel, dropped out of this characteristic letter as Miss Pink turned from the first page to the second. Lady Lydiard addressed her adopted daughter in these words:

"I was on the point of leaving home to visit you again, when I received your aunt's letter. My poor deluded child, no words can

tell how distressed I am about you. You are already sacrificed to the folly of the most foolish woman living. For God's sake, take care you do not fall a victim next to the designs of a profligate man! Come to me instantly, Isabel, and I promise to take care of you."

Fortified by these letters, and aided by Miss Pink's indignation, Hardyman pressed his proposal on Isabel with renewed resolution. She made no attempt to combat his arguments—she only held firmly by her decision. Without some encouragement from Hardyman's father and mother she still steadily refused to become his wife. Irritated already by Lady Lydiard's letters, he lost the self-command which so eminently distinguished him in the ordinary affairs of life, and showed the domineering and despotic temper which was an inbred part of his disposition. Isabel's high spirit at once resented the harsh terms in which he spoke to her. In the plainest words she released him from his engagement, and, without waiting for his excuses, quitted the room.

Left together, Hardyman and Miss Pink devised an arrangement which paid due respect to Isabel's scruples, and at the same time met Lady Lydiard's insulting assertion of disbelief in Hardyman's honor, by a formal and public announcement of the marriage.

It was proposed to give a garden-party at the farm in a week's time, for the express purpose of introducing Isabel to Hardyman's family and friends in the character of his betrothed wife. If his father and mother accepted the invitation, Isabel's only objection to hastening their union would fall to the ground. Hardyman might, in that case, plead with his imperial correspondent for a delay in his departure of a few days more; and the marriage might still take place before he left England. Isabel, at Miss Pink's intercession, was induced to accept her lover's excuses, and, in the event of her favorable reception by Hardyman's parents at the farm, to give her consent (not very willingly even yet) to hastening the ceremony which was to make her Hardyman's wife.

On the next morning the whole of the invitations were sent out, excepting the invitation to Hardyman's father and mother. Without mentioning it to Isabel, Hardyman decided on personally appealing to his mother before he ventured on taking the head of the family into his confidence.

The result of the interview was partially successful—and no more. Lord Rotherfield declined to see his youngest son; and he had engagements which would, under any circumstances, prevent his being present at the garden-party. But, at the express request of Lady Rotherfield, he was willing to make certain concessions.

"I have always regarded Alfred as a barely sane person," said his lordship, "since he turned his back on his prospects to become a horse-dealer. If we decline altogether to sanction this new act—I won't say of insanity, I will say of absurdity—on his part, it is impossible to predict to what discreditable extremities he may not proceed. We must temporize with Alfred. In the meantime I shall endeavor to obtain some information respecting this young person—named Miller, I think you said, and now resident at South Morden. If I am satisfied that she is a woman of reputable character, possessing an average education and presentable manners, we may as well let Alfred take his own way. He is out of the pale of society, as it is; and Miss Miller has no father and mother to complicate matters, which is distinctly a merit on her part—and, in short, if the marriage is not absolutely disgraceful, the wisest way (as we have no power to prevent it) will be to submit. You will say nothing to Alfred about what I propose to do. I tell you plainly I don't trust him. You will simply inform him from me that I want time to consider, and that, unless he hears to the contrary in the interval, he may expect to have the sanction of your presence at his breakfast, or luncheon, or whatever it is. I must go to town in a day or two, and I shall ascertain what Alfred's friends know about this last of his many follies, if I meet any of them at the club."

Returning to South Morden in no serene frame of mind, Hardyman found Isabel in a state of depression which perplexed and alarmed him.

The news that his mother might be expected to be present at the garden-party failed entirely to raise her spirits. The only explanation she gave of the change in her was that the dull, heavy weather of the last few days made her feel a little languid and nervous. Naturally dissatisfied with this reply to his inquiries, Hardyman asked for Miss Pink. He was informed that Miss Pink could not see him. She was constitutionally subject to asthma, and having warnings of a return of the malady, she was (by the doctor's advice) keeping her room. Hardyman returned to the farm in a temper which was felt by everybody in his employment, from the trainer to the stable-boys.

While the apology made for Miss Pink stated no more than the plain truth, it must be confessed that Hardyman was right in declining to be satisfied with Isabel's excuse for the melancholy that oppressed her. She had that morning received Moody's answer to the lines which she had addressed to him at the end of her aunt's letter, and she had not yet recovered from the effect which it had produced on her spirits.

"It is impossible for me to say honestly that I am not distressed" (Moody wrote) "by the news of your marriage engagement. The blow has fallen very heavily on me. When I look at the future now, I see only a dreary blank. This is not your fault; you are in no way to blame. I remember the time when I should have been too angry to own this—when I might have said or done things which I should have bitterly repented afterwards. That time is past. My temper has been softened since I have befriended you in your troubles. That good at least has come out of my foolish hopes, and perhaps also out of the true sympathy which I have felt for you. I can honestly ask you to accept my heart's dearest wishes for your happiness, and I can keep the rest to myself.

"Let me say a word now relating to the efforts that I have made to help you since that sad day when you left Lady Lydiard's house.

"I had hoped (for reasons which it is needless to mention here) to interest Mr. Hardyman himself in aiding our inquiry. But your aunt's wishes, as expressed in her letter to me, close my lips. I will only ask you, at some convenient time, to let me mention the last discoveries that we have made; leaving it to your discretion, when Mr. Hardyman has become your husband, to ask him the questions which, under other circumstances, I should have put to him myself.

"It is, of course, possible that the view I take of Mr. Hardyman's capacity to help us may be a mistaken one. In this case, if you still wish the investigation to be privately carried on, I beg of you to let me continue to direct it, as the greatest favor you can confer on your devoted old friend.

"You need be under no apprehension about the expense to which you are likely to put me. I have unexpectedly inherited what is to me a handsome fortune.

"The same post which brought your aunt's letter brought a line from a lawyer, asking me to see him on the subject of my late father's affairs. I waited a day or two before I could summon heart enough to see him, or to see anybody; and then I went to his office. You have heard that my father's bank stopped payment, at a time of commercial panic. His failure was mainly attributable to the treachery of a friend to whom he had lent a large sum of money, and who paid him the yearly interest without acknowledging that every farthing of it had been lost in unsuccessful speculations. The son of this man has prospered in business, and he has honorably devoted a part of his wealth to the payment of his father's creditors. Half the sum due to my father has thus passed into my hands as his next of kin, and the other half is to follow in course of time. If

my hopes had been fulfilled, how gladly I should have shared my prosperity with you! As it is, I have far more than enough for my wants as a lonely man, and plenty left to spend in your service.

"God bless and prosper you, my dear. I shall ask you to accept a little present from me, among the other offerings that are made to you before the wedding-day. R. M."

The studiously considerate and delicate tone in which these lines were written had an effect on Isabel which was exactly the opposite of the effect intended by the writer. She burst into a passionate fit of tears, and in the safe solitude of her own room the despairing words escaped her, "I wish I had died before I met with Alfred Hardyman!"

As the days wore on, disappointments and difficulties seemed, by a kind of fatality, to beset the contemplated announcement of the marriage.

Miss Pink's asthma, developed by the unfavorable weather, set the doctor's art at defiance, and threatened to keep that unfortunate lady a prisoner in her room on the day of the party. Hardyman's invitations were in some cases refused, and in others accepted by husbands, with excuses for the absence of their wives. His elder brother made an apology for himself as well as for his wife. Felix Sweetsir wrote, "With pleasure, dear Alfred, if my health permits me to leave the house." Lady Lydiard, invited at Miss Pink's special request, sent no reply. The one encouraging circumstance was the silence of Lady Rotherfield. So long as her son received no intimation to the contrary, it was a sign that Lord Rotherfield permitted his wife to sanction the marriage by her presence.

Hardyman wrote to his imperial correspondent, engaging to leave England on the earliest possible day, and asking to be pardoned if he failed to express himself more definitely, in consideration of domestic affairs which it was necessary to settle before he started for the Continent. If there should not be time enough to write again, he promised to send a telegraphic announcement of his departure. Long afterwards Hardyman remembered the misgivings that had troubled him when he wrote that letter. In the rough draft of it he had mentioned, as his excuse for not being yet certain of his own movements, that he expected to be immediately married. In the fair copy the vague foreboding of some accident to come was so painfully present to his mind that he struck out the words which referred to his marriage and substituted the designedly indefinite phrase, "domestic affairs."

CHAPTER XX.

THE day of the garden-party arrived. There was no rain, but the air was heavy, and the sky was overcast by lowering clouds.

Some hours before the guests were expected Isabel arrived alone at the farm, bearing the apologies of unfortunate Miss Pink, still kept a prisoner in her bedchamber by the asthma. In the confusion produced at the cottage by the preparations for entertaining the company, the one room in which Hardyman could receive Isabel with the certainty of not being interrupted was the smoking-room. To this haven of refuge he led her—still reserved and silent, still not restored to her customary spirits. "If any visitors come before the time," Hardyman said to his servant, "tell them I am engaged at the stables—I must have an hour's quiet talk with you," he continued, turning to Isabel, "or I shall be in too bad a temper to receive my guests with common politeness. The worry of giving this party is not to be told in words. I almost wish I had been content with presenting you to my mother, and had let the rest of my acquaintance go to the devil."

A quiet half hour passed, and the first visitor, a stranger to the servants, appeared at the cottage gate. He was a middle-aged man, and he had no wish to disturb Mr. Hardyman. "I will wait in the grounds," he said, "and trouble nobody." The middle-aged man who expressed himself in these modest terms was Robert Moody.

Five minutes later a carriage drove up to the gate. An elderly lady got out of it, followed by a fat white Scotch terrier that growled at every stranger within his reach. It is needless to introduce Lady Lydiard and Tommie.

Informed that Mr. Hardyman was at the stables, Lady Lydiard gave the servant her card. "Take that to your master, and say I won't detain him five minutes." With these words her ladyship sauntered into the grounds. She looked about her with observant eyes, not only noticing the tent which had been set up on the grass to accommodate the expected guests, but entering it, and looking at the waiters who were engaged in placing the luncheon on the table. Returning to the outer world, she next remarked that Mr. Hardyman's lawn was in very bad order. Barren, sun-dried patches, and little holes and crevices opened here and there by the action of the

summer heat, announced that the lawn, like everything else at the farm, had been neglected in the exclusive attention paid to the claims of the horses. Reaching a shrubbery which bounded one side of the grounds next, her ladyship became aware of a man slowly approaching her, to all appearance absorbed in thought. The man drew a little nearer. She lifted her glasses to her eyes, and recognized—Moody.

No embarrassment was produced on either side by this unexpected meeting. Lady Lydiard had, not long since, sent to ask her former steward to visit her, regretting in her warm-hearted way the terms on which they had separated, and wishing to atone for the harsh language that had escaped her at their parting interview. In the friendly talk which followed the reconciliation, Lady Lydiard not only heard the news of Moody's pecuniary inheritance, but, noticing the change in his appearance for the worse, contrived to extract from him the confession of his ill-starred passion for Isabel. To discover him now, after all that he had acknowledged, walking about the grounds at Hardyman's farm, took her ladyship completely by surprise. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, in her loudest tones, "what are *you* doing here?"

"You mentioned Mr. Hardyman's garden-party, my lady, when I had the honor of waiting on you," Moody answered. "Thinking over it afterwards, it seemed the fittest occasion I could find for making a little wedding-present to Miss Isabel. Is there any harm in my asking Mr. Hardyman to let me put the present on her plate, so that she may see it when she sits down to luncheon? If your ladyship thinks so I will go away directly, and send the gift by post."

Lady Lydiard looked at him attentively. "You don't despise the girl," she asked, "for selling herself for rank and money? I do, I can tell you."

Moody's worn white face flushed a little. "No, my lady," he answered, "I can't hear you say that. Isabel would not have engaged herself to Mr. Hardyman unless she had been fond of him—as fond, I dare say, as I once hoped she might be of me. It's a hard thing to confess that; but I do confess it, in justice to her—God bless her!"

The generosity that spoke in those simple words touched the finest sympathies in Lady Lydiard's nature. "Give me your hand," she said, with her own generous spirit kindling in her eyes. "You have a great heart, Moody. Isabel Miller is a fool for not marrying *you*—and one day she will know it."

Before a word more could pass between them, Hardyman's voice was audible on the other side of the shrubbery, calling irritably to his servant to find Lady Lydiard.

Moody retired to the farther end of the walk, while Lady Lydiard advanced in the opposite direction, so as to meet Hardyman at the entrance to the shrubbery. He bowed stiffly, and begged to know why her ladyship had honored him with a visit.

Lady Lydiard replied, without noticing the coldness of her reception:

"I have not been very well, Mr. Hardyman, or you would have seen me before this. My only object in presenting myself here is to make my excuses personally for having written of you in terms which expressed a doubt of your honor. I have done you an injustice, and I beg you to forgive me."

Hardyman acknowledged this frank apology as unreservedly as it had been offered to him. "Say no more, Lady Lydiard. And let me hope, now you are here, that you will honor my little party with your presence."

Lady Lydiard gravely stated her reasons for not accepting the invitation.

"I disapprove so strongly of unequal marriages," she said, walking on slowly towards the cottage, "that I cannot, in common consistency, become one of your guests. I shall always feel interested in Isabel Miller's welfare; and I can honestly say I shall be glad if your married life proves that my old-fashioned prejudices are without justification in your case. Accept my thanks for your invitation, and let me hope that my plain speaking has not offended you."

She bowed and looked about her for Tommie before she advanced to the carriage waiting for her at the gate. In the surprise of seeing Moody, she had forgotten to look back for the dog when she entered the shrubbery. She now called to him, and blew the whistle at her watch-chain. Not a sign of Tommie was to be seen. Hardyman instantly directed the servants to search in the cottage and out of the cottage for the dog. The order was obeyed with all needful activity and intelligence, and entirely without success. For the time being, at any rate, Tommie was lost.

Hardyman promised to have the dog looked for in every part of the farm, and to send him back in the care of one of his own men. With these polite assurances Lady Lydiard was obliged to be satisfied. She drove away in a very despondent frame of mind. "First Isabel, and now Tommie," thought her ladyship. "I am losing the only companions who made life tolerable to me."

Returning from the garden gate, after taking leave of his visitor, Hardyman received from his servant a handful of letters which had just arrived for him. Walking slowly over the lawn as he opened them, he found nothing but excuses for the absence of guests who

had already accepted their invitations. He had just thrust the letters into his pocket, when he heard footsteps behind him, and, looking round, found himself confronted by Moody.

"Halloo! have you come her to lunch?" Hardyman asked, roughly.

"I have come here, sir, with a little gift for Miss Isabel, in honor of her marriage," Moody answered, quietly. "And I ask your permission to put it on the table, so that she may see it when your guests sit down to luncheon."

He opened a jeweller's case as he spoke, containing a plain gold bracelet with an inscription engraved on the inner side: "To Miss Isabel Miller, with the sincere good wishes of Robert Moody."

Plain as it was, the design of the bracelet was unusually beautiful. Hardyman had noticed Moody's agitation on the day when he had met Isabel near her aunt's house, and had drawn his own conclusions from it. His face darkened with a momentary jealousy as he looked at the bracelet. "All right, old fellow!" he said, with contemptuous familiarity. "Don't be modest. Wait and give it to her with your own hand."

"No, sir," said Moody. "I would rather leave it, if you please, to speak for itself."

Hardyman understood the delicacy of feeling which dictated those words, and, without well knowing why, resented it. He was on the point of speaking, under the influence of this unworthy feeling, when Isabel's voice reached his ears, calling to him from the cottage.

Moody's face contracted with a sudden expression of pain as he, too, recognized the voice. "Don't let me detain you, sir," he said, sadly. "Good-morning!"

Hardyman left him without ceremony. Moody, slowly following, entered the tent. All the preparations for the luncheon had been completed; nobody was there. The places to be occupied by the guests were indicated by cards bearing their names. Moody found Isabel's card, and put his bracelet inside the folded napkin on her plate. For a while he stood with his hand on the table, thinking. The temptation to communicate once more with Isabel before he lost her forever was fast getting the better of his powers of resistance. "If I could persuade her to write a word to say she liked her bracelet," he thought, "it would be a comfort when I go back to my solitary life." He tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and wrote on it: "One line to say you accept my gift and my good wishes. Put it under the cushion of your chair, and I shall find it when the company have left the tent." He slipped the paper into the case which held the bracelet, and instead of leaving the farm as he had intended, turned back to the shelter of the shrubbery.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARDYMAN went on to the cottage. He found Isabel in some agitation. And there by her side, with his tail wagging slowly, and his eye on Hardyman in expectation of a possible kick—there was the lost Tommie!

"Has Lady Lydiard gone?" Isabel asked, eagerly.

"Yes," said Hardyman. "Where did you find the dog?"

As events had ordered it, the dog had found Isabel—under these circumstances.

The appearance of Lady Lydiard's card in the smoking-room had been an alarming event for Lady Lydiard's adopted daughter. She was guiltily conscious of not having answered her ladyship's note, enclosed in Miss Pink's letter, and of not having taken her ladyship's advice in resisting the advances of Hardyman. As he rose to leave the room and receive his visitor in the grounds, Isabel entreated him to say nothing of her presence at the farm, unless Lady Lydiard exhibited a forgiving turn of mind by asking to see her. Left by herself in the smoking-room, she suddenly heard a bark in the passage which had a familiar sound in her ears. She opened the door, and in rushed Tommie, with one of his shrieks of delight. Curiosity had taken him into the house. He had heard the voices in the smoking-room, had recognized Isabel's voice, and had waited, with his customary cunning and his customary distrust of strangers, until Hardyman was out of the way. Isabel kissed and caressed him, and then drove him out again to the lawn, fearing that Lady Lydiard might return to look for him. Going back to the smoking-room, she stood at the window watching for Hardyman's return. When the servants came in to look for the dog, she could only tell them that she had last seen him in the grounds, not far from the cottage. The useless search being abandoned, and the carriage having left the gate, who should crawl out from the back of a cupboard in which some empty hampers were placed but Tommie himself! How he had contrived to get back to the smoking-room (unless she had omitted to completely close the door on her return) it was impossible to say. But there he was, determined this time to stay with Isabel, and keeping in his hiding-place until he heard the movement of the carriage-wheels, which informed him that his lawful mistress

had left the cottage. Isabel had at once called to Hardyman, on the chance that the carriage might yet be stopped. It was already out of sight, and nobody knew which of two roads it had taken, both leading to London. In this emergency Isabel could only look at Hardyman, and ask what was to be done.

"I can't spare a servant till after the party," he answered. "The dog must be tied up at the stables."

Isabel shook her head. Tommie was not accustomed to be tied up. He would make a disturbance, and he would be beaten by the grooms. "I will take care of him," she said. "He won't leave me."

"There's something else to think of besides the dog," Hardyman rejoined, irritably. "Look at these letters!" He pulled them out of his pocket as he spoke. "Here are no less than seven men, all calling themselves my friends, who accepted my invitation, and who write to excuse themselves on the very day of the party! Do you know why? They're all afraid of my father: I forgot to tell you he's a cabinet minister as well as a lord. Cowards and cads! They have heard he isn't coming, and they think to curry favor with the great man by stopping away. Come along, Isabel! Let's take their names off the luncheon-table. Not a man of them shall ever darken my doors again!"

"I am to blame for what has happened," Isabel answered, sadly. "I am estranging you from your friends. There is still time, Alfred, to alter your mind and let me go."

He put his arm round her with rough fondness. "I would sacrifice every friend I have in the world rather than lose you. Come along!"

They left the cottage. At the entrance to the tent Hardyman noticed the dog at Isabel's heels, and vented his ill-temper, as usual with male humanity, on the nearest unoffending creature that he could find. "Be off, you mongrel brute!" he shouted. The tail of Tommie relaxed from its customary tight curve over the small of his back, and the legs of Tommie (with his tail between them) took him at full gallop to the friendly shelter of the cupboard in the smoking-room. It was one of those trifling circumstances which women notice seriously. Isabel said nothing; she only thought to herself, "I wish he had shown his temper when I first knew him!"

They entered the tent.

"I'll read the names," said Hardyman, "and you find the cards and tear them up. Stop! I'll keep the cards. You're just the sort of woman my father likes. He'll be reconciled to me when he sees you, after we are married. If one of those men ever asks him for a place, I'll take care, if it's years hence, to put an obstacle in his way."

Here, take my pencil, and make a mark on the cards to remind me; the same mark I set against a horse in my book when I don't like him—a cross enclosed in a circle." He produced his pocket-book. His hands trembled with anger as he gave the pencil to Isabel and laid the book on the table. He had just read the name of the first false friend, and Isabel had just found the card, when a servant appeared with a message. "Mrs. Drumblade has arrived, sir, and wishes to see you on a matter of the greatest importance."

Hardyman left the tent, not very willingly. "Wait here," he said to Isabel; "I'll be back directly."

She was standing near her own place at the table. Moody had left one end of the jeweller's case visible above the napkin, to attract her attention. In a minute more the bracelet and the note were in her hands. She dropped on her chair, overwhelmed by the conflicting emotions that rose in her at the sight of the bracelet, at the reading of the note. Her head drooped, and the tears filled her eyes. "Are all women as blind as I have been to what is good and noble in the men who love them?" she wondered, sadly. "Better as it is," she thought, with a bitter sigh; "I am not worthy of him."

As she took up the pencil to write her answer to Moody on the back of her dinner-card, the servant appeared again at the door of the tent.

"My master wants you at the cottage, miss, immediately."

Isabel rose, putting the bracelet and the note in the silver-mounted leather pocket (a present from Hardyman) which hung at her belt. In the hurry of passing round the table to get out, she never noticed that her dress touched Hardyman's pocket-book, placed close to the edge, and threw it down on the grass below. The book fell into one of the heat-cracks which Lady Lydiard had noticed as evidence of the neglected condition of the cottage lawn.

"You ought to hear the pleasant news my sister has just brought me," said Hardyman, when Isabel joined him in the parlor. "Mrs. Drumblade has been told, on the best authority, that my mother is not coming to the party."

"There must be some reason, of course, dear Isabel," added Mrs. Drumblade. "Have you any idea of what it can be? I haven't seen my mother myself, and all my inquiries have failed to find it out."

She looked searchingly at Isabel as she spoke. The mask of sympathy on her face was admirably worn. Nobody who possessed only a superficial acquaintance with Mrs. Drumblade's character would have suspected how thoroughly she was enjoying in secret the position of embarrassment in which her news had placed her brother. Instinctively doubting whether Mrs. Drumblade's friendly behavior was quite so sincere as it appeared to be, Isabel answered that she

was a stranger to Lady Rotherfield, and was therefore quite at a loss to explain the cause of her ladyship's absence. As she spoke, the guests began to arrive in quick succession, and the subject was dropped, as a matter of course.

It was not a merry party. Hardyman's approaching marriage had been made the topic of much malicious gossip, and Isabel's character had, as usual in such cases, become the object of all the false reports that scandal could invent. Lady Rotherfield's absence confirmed the general conviction that Hardyman was disgracing himself. The men were all more or less uneasy. The women resented the discovery that Isabel was, personally speaking at least, beyond the reach of hostile criticism. Her beauty was viewed as a downright offence; her refined and modest manners were set down as perfect acting—"Really disgusting, my dear, in so young a girl." General Drumblade—a large and mouldy veteran, in a state of chronic astonishment (after his own matrimonial experience) at Hardyman's folly in marrying at all—diffused a wide circle of gloom wherever he went and whatever he did. His accomplished wife, forcing her high spirits on everybody's attention with a sort of kittenish playfulness, intensified the depressing effect of the general dullness by all the force of the strongest contrast. After waiting half an hour for his mother, and waiting in vain, Hardyman led the way to the tent in despair. "The sooner I fill their stomachs and get rid of them," he thought, savagely, "the better I shall be pleased."

The luncheon was attacked by the company with a certain silent ferocity, which the waiters noticed as remarkable, even in their large experience. The men drank deeply, but with wonderfully little effect in raising their spirits; the women, with the exception of amiable Mrs. Drumblade, kept Isabel deliberately out of the conversation that went on among them. General Drumblade, sitting next to her in one of the places of honor, discoursed to Isabel privately on "my brother-in-law Hardyman's infernal temper." A young marquis, on her other side—a mere lad, chosen to make the necessary speech in acknowledgment of his superior rank—rose, in a state of nervous trepidation, to propose Isabel's health as the chosen bride of their host. Pale and trembling, conscious of having forgotten the words which he had learned beforehand, this unhappy young nobleman began, "Ladies and gentlemen, I haven't an idea—" He stopped, put his hand to his head, stared wildly, and sat down again, having contrived to state his own case with masterly brevity and perfect truth in a speech of seven words.

While the dismay in some cases and the amusement in others was still at its height, Hardyman's valet made his appearance, and

approaching his master, said, in a whisper, "Could I speak to you, sir, for a moment outside?"

"What the devil do you want?" Hardyman asked, irritably. "Is that a letter in your hand? Give it to me."

The valet was a Frenchman. In other words, he had a sense of what was due to himself. His master had forgotten this. He gave up the letter with a certain dignity of manner, and left the tent. Hardyman opened the letter. He turned pale as he read it, crumpled it in his hand, and threw it down on the table. "By G—d, it's a lie!" he exclaimed, furiously.

The guests rose in confusion. Mrs. Drumblade, finding the letter within her reach, coolly possessed herself of it, recognized her mother's hand-writing, and read these lines:

"I have only now succeeded in persuading your father to let me write to you. For God's sake, break off your marriage at any sacrifice. Your father has heard, on unanswerable authority, that Miss Isabel Miller left her situation in Lady Lydiard's house on suspicion of theft."

While his sister was reading this letter, Hardyman had made his way to Isabel's chair. "I must speak to you directly," he whispered. "Come away with me." He turned, as he took her arm, and looked at the table. "Where is my letter?" he asked. Mrs. Drumblade handed it to him, dextrously crumpled up again as she had found it.

"No bad news, dear Alfred, I hope?" she said, in her most affectionate manner. Hardyman snatched the letter from her, without answering, and led Isabel out of the tent.

"Read that," he said, when they were alone. "And tell me at once whether it's true or false."

Isabel read the letter. For a moment the shock of the discovery held her speechless. She recovered herself, and returned the letter.

"It is true," she answered.

Hardyman staggered back as if she had shot him.

"True that you are guilty?" he asked.

"No; I am innocent. Everybody who knows me believes in my innocence. It is true that the appearances were against me. They are against me still." Having said this, she waited, quietly and firmly, for his next words.

He passed his hand over his forehead with a sigh of relief. "It's bad enough as it is," he said, speaking quietly on his side. "But the remedy for it is plain enough. Come back to the tent."

She never moved. "Why?" she asked.

"Do you suppose I don't believe in your innocence too?" he answered. "The one way of setting you right with the world now is

for me to make you my wife, in spite of the appearances that point to you. I'm too fond of you, Isabel, to give you up. Come back with me, and I will announce our marriage to my friends."

She took his hand and kissed it. "It is generous and good of you," she said; "but it must not be."

He took a step nearer to her. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"It was against my will," she pursued, "that my aunt concealed the truth from you. I did wrong to consent to it; I will do wrong no more. Your mother is right, Alfred. After what has happened, I am not fit to be your wife until my innocence is proved. It is not proved yet."

The angry color began to rise in his face once more. "Take care," he said; "I am not in a humor to be trifled with."

"I am not trifling with you," she answered, in low, sad tones.

"You really mean what you say?"

"I mean it."

"Don't be obstinate, Isabel. Take time to consider."

"You are very kind, Alfred. My duty is plain to me. I will marry you—if you still wish it—when my good name is restored to me—not before."

He laid one hand on her arm, and pointed with the other to the guests in the distance, all leaving the tent on the way to their carriages.

"Your good name will be restored to you," he said, "on the day when I make you my wife. The worst enemy you have cannot associate *my* name with a suspicion of theft. Remember that, and think a little before you decide. You see those people there. If you don't change your mind by the time they have got to the cottage, it's good-bye between us, and good-bye forever. I refuse to wait for you; I refuse to accept a conditional engagement. Wait, and think. They're walking slowly; you have got some minutes more."

He still held her arm, watching the guests as they gradually receded from view. It was not until they had all collected in a group outside the cottage door that he spoke himself, or that he permitted Isabel to speak again.

"Now," he said, "you have had your time to get cool. Will you take my arm and join those people with me, or will you say good-bye forever?"

"Forgive me, Alfred," she began, gently. "I cannot consent, in justice to you, to shelter myself behind your name. It is the name of your family, and they have a right to expect that you will not degrade it—"

"I want a plain answer," he interposed, sternly. "Which is it? Yes or No?"

She looked at him with sad, compassionate eyes. Her voice was firm as she answered him in the one word that he had desired. The word was—"No!"

Without speaking to her, without even looking at her, he turned and walked back to the cottage.

Making his way silently through the group of visitors—every one of whom had been informed of what had happened by his sister—with his head down and his lips fast closed, he entered the parlor, and rang the bell which communicated with his foreman's rooms at the stables.

"You know that I am going abroad on business?" he said, when the man appeared.

"Yes, sir."

"I am going to-day—going by the night train to Dover. Order the horse to be put to instantly in the dog-cart. Is there anything wanted before I am off?"

The inexorable necessities of business asserted their claims through the obedient medium of the foreman. Chafing at the delay, Hardyman was obliged to sit at his desk, signing checks and passing accounts, with the dog-cart waiting in the stable-yard.

A knock at the door startled him in the middle of his work. "Come in!" he called out, sharply.

He looked up, expecting to see one of the guests or one of the servants. It was Moody who entered the room. Hardyman laid down his pen, and fixed his eyes sternly on the man who had dared to interrupt him.

"What the devil do *you* want?" he asked.

"I have seen Miss Isabel, and spoken with her," Moody replied. "Mr. Hardyman, I believe it is in your power to set this matter right. For the young lady's sake, sir, you must not leave England without doing it."

Hardyman turned to his foreman. "Is this fellow mad or drunk?" he asked.

Moody proceeded as calmly and as resolutely as if those words had not been spoken. "I apologize for my intrusion, sir. I will trouble you with no explanations; I will only ask one question. Have you a memorandum of the number of that five-hundred-pound note which you paid away in France?"

Hardyman lost all control over himself.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, "have you been prying into my private affairs? Is it *your* business to know what I did in France?"

"Is it *your* vengeance on a woman to refuse to tell her the number of a bank-note?" Moody rejoined, firmly.

That answer forced its way through Hardyman's anger to Har-

dyman's sense of honor. He rose and advanced to Moody. For a moment the two men faced each other in silence. "You're a bold fellow," said Hardyman, with a sudden change from anger to irony. "I'll do the lady justice. I'll look at my pocket-book."

He put his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat; he searched his other pockets; he turned over the objects on his writing-table. The book was gone.

Moody watched him with a feeling of despair. "Oh, Mr. Hardyman, don't say you have lost your pocket-book!"

He sat down again at his desk, with sullen submission to the new disaster. "All I can say is, you're at liberty to look for it," he replied. "I must have dropped it somewhere." He turned impatiently to the foreman. "Now, then, what is the next check wanted? I shall go mad if I wait in this damned place much longer."

Moody left him, and found his way to the servants' offices. "Mr. Hardyman has lost his pocket-book," he said. "Look for it, indoors and out, on the lawn and in the tent. Ten pounds reward for the man who finds it!"

Servants and waiters instantly dispersed, eager for the promised reward. The men who pursued the search outside the cottage divided their forces. Some of them examined the lawn and the flower beds; others went straight to the empty tent. These last were too completely absorbed in pursuing the object in view to notice that they disturbed a dog eating a stolen lunch of his own from the morsels left on the plates. The dog slunk away under the canvas when the men came in, waited in hiding until they had gone, then returned to the tent, and went on with his luncheon.

Moody hastened back to the part of the grounds (close to the shrubbery) in which Isabel was waiting his return.

She looked at him, while he was telling her of his interview with Hardyman, with an expression in her eyes which he had never seen in them before—an expression which set his heart beating wildly, and made him break off in his narrative before he had reached the end.

"I understand," she said, quietly, as he stopped in confusion. "You have made one more sacrifice to my welfare. Robert, I believe you are the noblest man that ever breathed the breath of life!"

His eyes sank before hers; he blushed like a boy. "I have done nothing for you yet," he said. "Don't despair of the future if the pocket-book should not be found. I know who the man is who received the bank-note, and I have only to find him to decide the question whether it is the stolen note or not."

She smiled sadly at his enthusiasm. "Are you going back to Mr.

Sharon to help you?" she asked. "That trick he played me has destroyed *my* belief in him. He no more knows than I do who the thief really is."

"You are mistaken, Isabel. He knows, and I know." He stopped there, and made a sign to her to be silent. One of the servants was approaching them.

"Is the pocket-book found?" Moody asked.

"No, sir."

"Has Mr. Hardyman left the cottage?"

"He has just gone, sir. Have you any further instructions to give us?"

"No. There is my address in London if the pocket-book should be found."

The man took the card that was handed to him, and retired. Moody offered his arm to Isabel. "I am at your service," he said, "when you wish to return to your aunt."

They had advanced nearly as far as the tent, on their way out of the grounds, when they were met by a gentleman walking towards them from the cottage. He was a stranger to Isabel. Moody immediately recognized him as Mr. Felix Sweetsir.

"Ha! our good Moody!" cried Felix. "Enviably man! you look younger than ever." He took off his hat to Isabel; his bright, restless eyes suddenly became quiet as they rested on her. "Have I the honor of addressing the future Mrs. Hardyman? May I offer my best congratulations? What has become of our friend Alfred?"

Moody answered for Isabel. "If you will make inquiries at the cottage, sir," he said, "you will find that you are mistaken, to say the least of it, in addressing your questions to this young lady."

Felix took off his hat again with the most becoming appearance of surprise and distress.

"Something wrong, I fear," he said, addressing Isabel. "I am indeed ashamed if I have ignorantly given you a moment's pain. Pray accept my most sincere apologies. I have only this instant arrived; my health would not allow me to be present at the luncheon. Permit me to express the earnest hope that matters may be set right, to the satisfaction of all parties. Good-afternoon."

He bowed with elaborate courtesy, and turned back to the cottage.

"Who is that?" Isabel asked.

"Lady Lydiard's nephew, Mr. Felix Sweetsir," Moody answered, with a sudden sternness of tone and a sudden coldness of manner which surprised Isabel.

"You don't like him?" she said.

As she spoke, Felix stopped to give audience to one of the grooms, who had, apparently, been sent with a message to him. He turned

so that his face was once more visible to Isabel. Moody pressed her hand significantly as it rested on his arm.

"Look well at that man," he whispered. "It's time to warn you. Mr. Felix Sweetsir is the worst enemy you have!"

Isabel heard him in speechless astonishment. He went on in tones that trembled with suppressed emotion.

"You doubt if Sharon knows the thief. You doubt if I know the thief. Isabel, as certainly as the heaven is above us, there stands the wretch who stole the bank-note!"

She drew her hand out of his arm with a cry of terror. She looked at him as if she doubted whether he was in his right mind.

He took her hand, and waited a moment, trying to compose himself.

"Listen to me," he said. "At the first consultation I had with Sharon he gave this advice to Mr. Troy and to me. He said, 'Suspect the very last person on whom suspicion could possibly fall.' Those words, taken with the questions he had asked before he pronounced his opinion, struck through me as if he had struck me with a knife. I instantly suspected Lady Lydiard's nephew. Wait! From that time to this I have said nothing of my suspicion to any living soul. I knew in my own heart that it took its rise in the inveterate dislike that I have always felt for Mr. Sweetsir, and I distrusted it accordingly. But I went back to Sharon, for all that, and put the case into his hands. His investigations informed me that Mr. Sweetsir owed 'debts of honor' (as gentlemen called them), incurred through lost bets, to a large number of persons, and among them a bet of five hundred pounds lost to Mr. Hardyman. Further inquiries showed that Mr. Hardyman had taken the lead in declaring that he would post Mr. Sweetsir as a defaulter, and have him turned out of his clubs, and turned out of the betting ring. Ruin stared him in the face if he failed to pay his debt to Mr. Hardyman on the last day left to him—the day after the note was lost. On that very morning Lady Lydiard, speaking to me of her nephew's visit to her, said, 'If I had given him an opportunity of speaking, Felix would have borrowed money of me; I saw it in his face.' One moment more, Isabel. I am not only certain that Mr. Sweetsir took the five-hundred-pound note out of the open letter, I am firmly persuaded that he is the man who told Lord Rotherfield of the circumstances under which you left Lady Lydiard's house. Your marriage to Mr. Hardyman might have put you in a position to detect the theft. You, not I, might in that case have discovered from your husband that the stolen note was the note with which Mr. Sweetsir paid his debt. He came here, you may depend on it, to make sure that he had succeeded in destroying your prospects.

A more depraved villain at heart than that man never swung from a gallows!"

He checked himself at those words. The shock of the disclosure, the passion and vehemence with which he spoke, overwhelmed Isabel. She trembled like a frightened child.

While he was still trying to soothe and re-assure her a low whining made itself heard at their feet. They looked down, and saw Tommie. Finding himself noticed at last, he expressed his sense of relief by a bark. Something dropped out of his mouth. As Moody stooped to pick it up, the dog ran to Isabel and pushed his head against her feet, as his way was when he expected to have the handkerchief thrown over him preparatory to one of those games at hide-and-seek which have been already mentioned. Isabel put out her hand to caress him, when she was stopped by a cry from Moody. It was *his* turn to tremble now. His voice faltered as he said the words, "The dog has found the pocket-book!"

He opened the book with shaking hands. A betting-book was bound up in it with the customary calendar. He turned to the date of the day after the robbery.

There was the entry: "Felix Sweetsir. Paid £500. Note numbered N 8, 70,564; dated 15th May, 1875."

Moody took from his waistcoat-pocket his own memorandum of the number of the lost bank-note. "Read it, Isabel," he said. "I won't trust my memory."

She read it. The number and date of the note entered in the pocket-book exactly corresponded with the number and date of the note that Lady Lydiard had placed in her letter.

Moody handed the pocket-book to Isabel. "There is the proof of your innocence," he said, "thanks to the dog. Will you write and tell Mr. Hardyman what has happened?" he asked, with his head down and his eyes on the ground.

She answered him, with the bright color suddenly flowing over her face.

"You shall write to him," she said, "when the time comes."

"What time?" he asked.

She threw her arms round his neck, and hid her face on his bosom. "The time," she whispered, "when I am your wife."

A low growl from Tommie reminded them that he too had some claim to be noticed.

Isabel dropped on her knees, and saluted her old playfellow with the heartiest kisses she had ever given him since the day when their acquaintance began. "You darling!" she said, as she put him down again, "what can I do to reward you?"

Tommie rolled over on his back—more slowly than usual, in con-

sequence of his luncheon in the tent. He elevated his four paws in the air, and looked lazily at Isabel out of his bright brown eyes. If ever a dog's look spoke yet, Tommie's look said, "I have eaten too much; rub my stomach."

POSTSCRIPT.

Persons of a speculative turn of mind are informed that the following document is for sale, and are requested to mention what sum they will give for it:

"I O U, Lady Lydiard, five hundred pounds (£500).

"FELIX SWEETSIR."

Her ladyship became possessed of this pecuniary remittance under circumstances that surround it with a halo of romantic interest. It was the last communication she was destined to receive from her accomplished nephew; and there was a Note attached to it, which cannot fail to enhance its value in the estimation of all right-minded persons who assist the circulation of paper-money.

The lines that follow are strictly confidential:

"*Note.*—Our excellent Moody informs me, my dear aunt, that you have decided (against his advice) on 'refusing to prosecute.' I have not the slightest idea of what he means; but I am very much obliged to him, nevertheless, for reminding me of a circumstance which is of some interest to yourself personally.

"I am on the point of retiring to the Continent in search of health. One generally forgets something important when one starts on a journey. Before Moody called, I had entirely forgotten to mention that I had the pleasure of borrowing five hundred pounds of you some little time since.

"On the occasion to which I refer, your language and manner suggested that you would not lend me the money if I asked for it. Obviously, the only course left was to take it without asking. I took it while Moody was gone to get me some Curaçoa; and I returned to the picture-gallery in time to receive that delicious liqueur from the footman's hands.

"You will naturally ask why I found it necessary to supply myself (if I may borrow an expression from the language of State finance) with this 'forced loan.' I was actuated by motives which I think do me honor. My position at the time was critical in the extreme. My credit with the money-lenders was at an end; my friends had all turned their backs on me. I must either take the

money or disgrace my family. If there is a man living who is sincerely attached to his family, I am that man. I took the money.

"Conceive your position as my aunt (I say nothing of myself), if I had adopted the other alternative. Turned out of the Jockey Club, turned out of Tattersalls', turned out of the betting ring; in short, posted publicly as a defaulter before the noblest institution in England—the Turf; and all for want of five hundred pounds to stop the mouth of the greatest brute I know of—Alfred Hardyman! Let me not harrow your feelings (and mine) by dwelling on it. Dear and admirable woman! To you belongs the honor of saving the credit of the family. I can claim nothing but the inferior merit of having offered you the opportunity.

"My I O U, it is needless to say, accompanies these lines. Can I do anything for you abroad? F. S."

To this it is only necessary to add, first, that Moody was perfectly right in believing F. S. to be the person who informed Hardyman's father of Isabel's position when she left Lady Lydiard's house; and, secondly, that Felix did really forward Mr. Troy's narrative of the theft to the French police, altering nothing in it but the number of the lost bank-note.

What is there left to write about? Nothing is left, but to say good-bye (very sorrowfully on the writer's part) to the Persons of the Story.

Good-bye to Miss Pink—who will regret to her dying day that Isabel's answer to Hardyman was No.

Good-bye to Lady Lydiard—who differs with Miss Pink, and would have regretted it to *her* dying day if the answer had been Yes.

Good-bye to Moody and Isabel—whose history has closed with the closing of the clergyman's book on their wedding-day.

Good-bye to Hardyman—who has sold his farm and his horses, and has begun a new life among the famous fast trotters of America.

Good-bye to Old Sharon—who, a martyr to his promise, brushed his hair and washed his face in honor of Moody's marriage; and catching a severe cold as the necessary consequence, declared, in the intervals of sneezing, that he would "never do it again."

And last, not least, good-bye to Tommie. No. The writer gave Tommie his dinner not half an hour since, and is too fond of him to say good-bye.

PERCY AND THE PROPHET.

EVENTS IN THE LIVES OF A LADY AND HER LOVERS.

FIRST WORDS.

THE late Lieutenant-colonel Bervie was generally very willing to tell the eventful love story of his youthful days to any persons who were really desirous of hearing it. In relating, at the outset of his narrative, the extraordinary manner in which a total stranger foretold certain events which affected the happiness of two other persons besides himself, he never laid any claims to the unquestioning belief of his audience. "Form your own opinion, friends," he used to say. "Whether I am relating a series of marvels or a series of coincidences, I give you my word of honor I am telling you the truth. If this assurance does not satisfy you, I can only recommend the same modest view of questions that are beyond the range of our own experience which wise Shakespeare advocates in those well-known lines: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'"

So the old soldier spoke, when years had taught him to be tolerant of all men, in the peaceful evening of his life.

The story is once more told in these pages, with the colonel's reservations, though not always in the colonel's language. For example, the noble conduct of one of the characters (to which he never did justice) will now be found to occupy the prominent place on the scene that is fairly its due.

THE STORY.

Part the First.

THE PREDICTION.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUACK.

THE disasters that follow the hateful offence against Christianity which men call War were severely felt in England during the peace that ensued on the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo. At this melancholy period of our national history, agriculture, manufactures, and commerce suffered an unexampled depression. The deficiency in the revenue was publicly acknowledged in Parliament to be alarming. With rare exceptions distress prevailed among all classes of the community. The starving nation was ripe and ready for a revolutionary rising against its rulers—the rulers who had shed the people's blood and wasted the people's substance in a war which had yielded to the popular interests absolutely nothing in return.

Among the unfortunate persons who were driven, during the disastrous early years of this century, to strange shifts and devices to obtain the means of living, was a certain obscure medical man, of French extraction, named Lagarde. The doctor (duly qualified in England as well as in his own country to bear the title) was an inhabitant of London, living in one of the narrow streets which connect the great thoroughfare of the Strand with the banks of the Thames.

The method of obtaining employment chosen by poor Lagarde as the one alternative left in the face of starvation, was, and is still, considered by the medical profession to be the method of a quack. He advertised in the public journals.

In language studiously free from pretence or exaggeration, the French physician declared himself to have been converted to a belief in animal magnetism (as it was then called) by serious study of

the discoveries first announced in France by the famous Mesmer. The two classes of the community to which his appeal was addressed were, first, persons of the invalid sort, afflicted with maladies which ordinary medical practice had failed to cure; and, secondly, persons disposed towards mystical investigation, who might be inclined to test the power of "clairvoyance" as a means of revealing the hidden chances and changes of the future. "No fee is exacted from those who may honor me with their confidence," the doctor modestly added, "because I cannot guarantee beforehand that I shall be successful in ministering to their necessities and wishes. The process that I employ is no secret; it was first made public long before my time. I am thrown into a magnetic sleep, and the hand of the person who consults me is placed in mine. The result depends entirely on mysterious laws of nervous sympathy and nervous insight, to the existence of which I can testify, but which (in the present state of scientific inquiry) I am not able to explain. Those whom I am fortunate enough to satisfy are requested to drop their offerings, according to their means, into a money-box fixed on the waiting-room table. Those whom I do not satisfy will be pleased to accept the expression of my regret, and will not be expected to give anything. It is quite possible that I may be the dupe of mistaken convictions: all I ask of the public is to believe that they are at least the convictions of an honest man. I have only to add that ladies and gentlemen who may wish to give me a trial will find me at home in the evening, between the hours of six and ten."

Towards the close of the year 1816 this strange advertisement became a general topic of conversation among educated people in London. For some weeks the "sittings" of the seer were largely attended, and (all things considered) were not badly remunerated. A faithful few believed in him, and told wonderful stories of what he had pronounced and prophesied in his state of trance. The majority of his visitors simply viewed him in the light of a public amusement, and wondered why such a gentleman-like man should have chosen to gain his living by exhibiting himself as a quack.

CHAPTER II.

THE NUMBERS.

ON a raw and snowy evening towards the latter part of January, 1817, a gentleman, walking along the Strand, turned into the street in which Doctor Legarde lived, and knocked at the mesmerist's door. The gentleman was young and handsome, with a certain peculiarity in his gait which revealed him as belonging to the mil-

itary profession. His dress studiously avoided the exaggerations and absurdities of the hideous fashion prevailing in those days. In a word, the outward mark set on him was the mark which unmistakably proclaims a well-bred man.

He was admitted by an elderly male servant to a waiting-room on the first floor. The light of one little lamp, placed on a bracket fixed to the wall, was so obscured by a dark green shade as to make it difficult, if not impossible, for visitors meeting by accident to recognize each other. The metal money-box fixed to the table was just visible. In the flickering light of a small fire the stranger perceived the figures of three men seated, apart and silent, who were the only occupants of the room besides himself. The wretched weather had, no doubt, kept the doctor's lady visitors at home. So far as objects were to be seen, there was nothing to attract attention in the waiting-room. The furniture was plain and neat, and nothing more. The elderly servant handed a card, with a number inscribed on it, to the new visitor, said in a whisper, "Your number will be called, sir, in your turn," and disappeared. For some minutes nothing disturbed the deep silence but the faint ticking of a clock. After a while a bell rang from an inner room, a door opened and a gentleman appeared, whose interview with Doctor Legarde had terminated. His opinion of the sitting was openly expressed in one emphatic word — "Humbug!" No contribution dropped from his hand as he passed the money-box on his way out.

The next number (being Number Fifteen) was called by the elderly servant, and the first incident occurred in the strange series of events destined to happen in the doctor's house that night.

One after another the three men who had been waiting rose, examined their cards under the light of the lamp, and sat down again, surprised and disappointed. The servant advanced to investigate the matter. The numbers possessed by the three visitors, instead of being Fifteen, Sixteen, and Seventeen, proved to be Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen. Turning to the stranger who had arrived the last, the servant said,

"Have I made a mistake, sir? My sight is not so good as it was, and I am afraid I have awkwardly confused the cards in this dark place. Have I given you Number Fifteen instead of Number Eighteen?"

The gentleman produced his card. A mistake had certainly been made, but not the mistake that the servant supposed. The card held by the latest visitor turned out to be the card previously held by the dissatisfied stranger who had just left the room—Number Fourteen! As to the card numbered Fifteen, it was only discovered the next morning lying in a corner, dropped on the floor!

Acting on his first impulse, the servant hurried out of the room, calling to the gentleman who had been the original holder of Fourteen to come back and bear his testimony to that fact. The street door had been opened for him by the landlady of the house. She was a pretty woman, and the gentleman had fortunately lingered to talk to her. He was induced, at the intercession of the landlady, to ascend the stairs again. On returning to the waiting-room he addressed a characteristic question to the assembled visitors. "*More humbug?*" asked the gentleman who liked to talk to a pretty woman.

The servant—completely puzzled by his own stupidity—attempted to make his apologies.

"Pray forgive me, gentlemen," he said. "I am afraid I have confused the cards I distribute with the cards returned to me. In the case of mistakes of any kind I am ordered to set them right on the spot. In *this* case I think I had better consult my master."

He disappeared in the inner room. Left by themselves the visitors began to speak jestingly of the strange situation in which they were placed. The original holder of Number Fourteen described his own experience of the doctor in his own pithy way. "I applied to the fellow to tell my fortune. He first went to sleep over it, and then he said he could tell me nothing. I asked why. 'I don't know,' says he. '*I do*,' says I—'humbug!' I'll bet you the long odds, gentlemen, that *you* find it humbug too."

Before the wager could be accepted or declined the door of the inner room was opened again. The tall, lean, black figure of a new personage appeared on the threshold, relieved darkly against the light in the room behind him. A singularly quiet, sad voice addressed the visitors in these words:

"Gentlemen, I must beg your indulgence. The apparent accident which has given to the last comer the number already held by a gentleman who has unsuccessfully consulted me, may have a meaning which we can none of us at present see. Observe, I don't speak positively, I only say it may be. If the three visitors who have been so good as to wait will allow the present holder of Number Fourteen to consult me out of his turn, and if the earlier visitor who left me dissatisfied with his consultation will consent to stay here a little longer, I pledge myself, if nothing happens during the first ten minutes of the interview, to receive the gentlemen who have yet to consult me, and to detain no longer the gentleman who has seen me already. On the other hand, if anything does happen, there is a chance at least that one among you—most likely the original holder of Number Fourteen—may be concerned in it. Under these circumstances, is ten minutes' patience too much to ask of you?"

The three visitors who had waited longest consulted among them-

selves, and (having nothing better to do with their time) decided on accepting the doctor's proposal. The visitor who believed it all to be "humbug" coolly took a gold coin out of his pocket, tossed it into the air, caught it in his closed hand, and walked up to the shaded lamp on the bracket. "Heads, stay," he said, "Tails, go." He opened his hand and looked at the coin. "Heads! Very good. Go on with your hocus-pocus, sir—I'll wait."

"You believe in chance," said the doctor, quietly observing him. "That is not my experience of life."

He paused to let the stranger who held Number Fourteen pass him into the inner room—then followed, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER III.

THE CONSULTATION.

THE consulting-room was better lighted than the waiting-room, and that was the only difference between the two. In the one, as in the other, no attempt was made to impress the imagination. Everywhere the commonplace furniture of a London lodging-house was left without the slightest effort to alter or improve it by changes of any kind.

Seen under the clearer light, Doctor Lagarde appeared to be the last person living who would consent to degrade himself by an attempt at imposture of any kind. His eyes were the dreamy eyes of a visionary; his look was the prematurely aged look of a student accustomed to give the hours to his book which ought to have been given to his bed. To state it briefly, the disciple of Mesmer was a man who might easily be deceived by others, but who was incapable of consciously practising deception himself. Signing to his visitor to take a chair, he seated himself on the opposite side of the small table that stood between them, waited a moment with his face hidden in his hands, as if to collect himself, and then spoke.

"Do you come to consult me on a case of illness?" he inquired, "or do you ask me to look into the darkness which hides your future life?"

The stranger answered, gravely, "I have no need to consult you about my health. I come to hear what you can tell me of my future life."

"You know that I can try," pursued the doctor, "but that I cannot promise to succeed?"

"I accept your conditions," the stranger rejoined. "I neither believe nor disbelieve. If you will excuse my speaking frankly, I mean to observe you closely, and to decide for myself."

Doctor Lagarde smiled sadly.

"You have heard of me as a charlatan who contrives to amuse a few idle people," he said. "I don't complain of that; my present position leads necessarily to misinterpretation of myself and my motives. Still I may at least say that I am the victim of a sincere avowal of my belief in a great science. Yes, I repeat it, a great science! New, I dare say, to the generation we live in, though it was known and practised in the days when the Pyramids were built. My sincerity in this matter has cost me the income that I derived from my medical practice. Patients distrust me; doctors refuse to consult with me. I could starve if I had no one to think of but myself. But I have another person to consider, who is very dear to me; and I am driven, literally driven, either to turn beggar in the streets or to do what I am doing now. Everything is against me. I am a needy foreigner (naturally distrusted in this country). I am a republican and a socialist (naturally exiled from my own country). Who will help such an outlawed man as I am? It doesn't matter. The age is advancing, and the great truths which it is my misfortune to advocate before the time is ripe for them are steadily forcing their way to recognition. They will conquer yet, when the hard struggle of life is over for the poor quack who now presumes to speak to you. Enough (and too much) of myself! Let us, as you say in England, get to business. To be of any use to you, I must first be thrown into the magnetic trance. The person who has the strongest influence over me is the person who will do it to-night." He paused, and looked round towards the corner of the room behind him. "Mother," he said, gently, "are you ready?"

An elderly lady, dressed in deep mourning, rose from her seat in the corner. She had been thus far hidden from notice by the high back of the easy-chair in which her son sat. Excepting some folds of fine black lace laid over her white hair so as to form a head-dress at once simple and picturesque, there was nothing remarkable in her attire. The visitor, well accustomed to the society of women of high rank and breeding, rose and bowed, as if (stranger though she was to him) he recognized a person of distinction. She gravely returned his salute, and moved round the table so as to place herself opposite to her son.

"When you please, Henry," she said.

Bending over him, she took both the doctor's hands in hers, and fixed her eyes steadily on his. No words passed between them; nothing more took place. In a minute or two his head was resting against the back of the chair, and his eyelids had closed.

"Are you sleeping?" asked Madame Lagarde.

"I am sleeping," he answered.

She laid his hands gently on the arms of the chair, and turned to address the visitor.

"Let the sleep gain on him for a minute or two more," she said. "Then take one of his hands and put to him what questions you please."

"Does he hear us now, madam?"

"You might fire off a pistol, sir, close to his ear and he would not hear it. The vibration might disturb him, that is all. Until you or I touch him, and so establish the nervous sympathy, he is as lost to all sense of our presence here as if he were dead."

"You believe in magnetism yourself, of course?"

"My son's belief, sir, is mine in this thing as in other things. I have heard what he has been saying to you. It is for me that he sacrifices himself by holding these exhibitions; it is in my poor interests that his hardly earned money is made. I am in infirm health; and remonstrate as I may, my son persists in providing for me, not the bare comforts only, but even the luxuries of life. Except in this he has never heard me express a wish without cheerfully obeying it. Whatever I may suffer I have my compensation; I can still thank God for giving me the greatest happiness that a woman can enjoy, the possession of a good son." She smiled fondly as she looked at the sleeping man. "Draw your chair nearer to him," she resumed, "and take his hand. You may speak freely in making your inquiries. Nothing that happens in this room ever goes out of it."

With those words she returned to her place in the corner behind her son's chair.

The visitor took Doctor Lagarde's hand. As they touched each other he was conscious of a faintly titillating sensation in his own hand—a sensation which oddly reminded him of by-gone experiments with an electrical machine, in the days when he was a boy at school.

"I wish to question you about my future life," he began. "How ought I to begin?"

The doctor spoke his first words in the monotonous tones of a man talking in his sleep.

"Own your true motive before you begin," he said. "Your interest in your future life is centred in a woman. She has not positively rejected you, and she has not openly encouraged you, in the time that is past. You wish to know if her heart will be yours in the time that is to come—and there your interest in your future life ends."

This startling assertion of the sleeper's capacity to look by sympathy into his mind, and to see there his most secret thoughts, instead of convincing the stranger, excited his suspicions. "You

have means of getting information," he said, roughly, "that I don't understand."

The doctor laughed, as if the idea amused him. Madame Lagarde rose from her place and interposed.

"Hundreds of strangers come here to consult my son," she said, quietly. "If you believe that we know who those strangers are, and that we have the means of inquiring into their private lives before they enter this room, you believe in something much more incredible than the magnetic sleep!"

This was too manifestly true to be disputed. The visitor, a man of strong good sense when his temper was not ruffled, made his apologies.

"I should like to have *some* explanation," he added. "The thing is so very extraordinary. How can I prevail upon Doctor Lagarde to enlighten me?"

"He can only tell you what he sees," Madame Lagarde answered; "ask him that, and you will get a direct reply. Say to him, 'Do you see the lady?'"

The stranger repeated the question. The reply followed at once, in these words:

"I see darkness all about me, except in one place where there is light like the light of a dim moon. In the illuminated space I see two figures standing side by side. One of them is your figure. The other is the figure of a lady. She only appears dimly. I can see nothing but that she is taller than women generally are, and that she is dressed in pale blue."

The stranger started at those last words. "Her favorite color!" he thought to himself, forgetting that, while he held the doctor's hand, the doctor could think with *his* mind.

"Yes," added the sleeper, quietly, "her favorite color, as you know. She fades and fades as I look at her," he went on. "She is gone. I only see you. Your hands are over your face; you are crying; you look like a man who is suffering from some dreadful disappointment. Wait a little. You too are growing indistinct; you too fade away altogether. The darkness gathers. I see nothing."

A pause of silence followed. Then the face of the sleeper began to show signs of disturbance for the first time. The stranger put the customary question to him: "What do you see?"

"I see you again. You have a pistol in your hand. Opposite to you there stands the figure of another man. He too has a pistol in his hand. Are you enemies? Are you meeting to fight a duel? Is the lady the cause? I try, but I fail to see her."

"Can you describe the man?"

"Not yet. So far he is only a shadow in the form of a man."

There was another interval. The appearance of disturbance grew more marked on the sleeper's face. Suddenly he waved his free hand in the direction of the waiting-room.

"Send for the visitors who are there," he said. "They are all to come in. Each one of them is to take one of my hands in turn, while you remain where you are, holding the other. Don't let go of me, even for a moment. My mother will ring."

Madame Lagarde touched a bell on the table. The servant received his orders from her and retired. After a short absence he appeared again in the consulting-room, with one visitor only waiting on the threshold behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN.

"THE other three gentlemen have gone away, madam," the servant explained, addressing Madame Lagarde. "They were tired of waiting. I found *this* gentleman fast asleep; and I am afraid he is angry with me for taking the liberty of waking him."

"Sleep of the common sort is evidently not allowed in this house," the gentleman remarked at the door. "It isn't my fault—I couldn't mesmerize myself, could I?"

The speaker entered the room, and stood revealed as the original owner of the card numbered Fourteen. Viewed by the clear lamp-light, he was a tall, finely made man, in the prime of life, with a florid complexion, golden-brown hair, and sparkling blue eyes. Noticing Madame Lagarde, he instantly checked the flow of his satire with the instinctive good-breeding of a gentleman. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I have a great many faults, and a habit of making bad jokes is one of them. Is the servant right, madam, in telling me that I have the honor of presenting myself here at your request?"

Madame Lagarde briefly explained what had passed. The florid gentleman (still privately believing it to be all "humbug") was delighted to make himself of any use. "I congratulate you, sir," he said, with his easy humor, as he passed the visitor who had taken his card. "Number Fourteen seems to be a luckier number in your keeping than it was in mine."

As he spoke he took Doctor Lagarde's disengaged hand. The instant they touched each other the sleeper started. His voice rose; his face flushed. "You are the man!" he exclaimed. "I see you plainly now!"

"What am I doing?"

"You are standing opposite to the gentleman here who is holding my other hand, and you are lifting a pistol to take aim at him."

The unbeliever cast a shrewd look at his companion in the consultation. His inveterate habit of taking the ironical view of everything got the better of him again.

"Considering that you and I are total strangers, sir," he said, "don't you think the doctor had better introduce us before he goes any farther? We have got to fighting a duel already, and we may as well know who we are before the pistols go off." He turned to Doctor Lagarde. "Dramatic situations don't amuse me out of the theatre," he resumed. "Let me put you to a very commonplace test. I want to be introduced to this gentleman. Has he told you his name?"

"No."

"Of course you know it without being told?"

"Certainly. I have only to look into your own knowledge of yourselves while I am in this trance, and while you have got my hands, to know both your names as well as you do."

"Introduce us, then!" retorted the jesting gentleman. "And take my name first."

"Mr. Percy Linwood," replied the doctor, "I have the honor of presenting you to Captain Bervie, of the Artillery."

With one accord the gentlemen both dropped Doctor Lagarde's hands, and looked at each other in blank amazement.

"Of course he has discovered our names somehow," said Mr. Percy Linwood, cutting the Gordian knot to his own perfect satisfaction in that way.

Captain Bervie had not forgotten what Madame Lagarde had said to him when he too had suspected a trick. He now repeated it (quite ineffectually) for Mr. Linwood's benefit. "If you don't feel the force of that argument as I feel it," he added, "perhaps, as a favor to me, sir, you will not object to our each taking the doctor's hand again, and hearing what more he can tell us while he remains in the state of trance?"

"With the greatest pleasure," answered good-humored Mr. Linwood. "Our friend is beginning to amuse me; I am as anxious as you are to know what he is going to see next."

Captain Bervie put the next question.

"You have seen us fighting a duel—can you tell us the result?"

"I can tell you nothing more than I have told you already. The figures of the duellists have faded away, like the other figures that I saw before them. What I see now looks like the winding gravel-path of a garden. A man and a woman are walking towards me.

The man stops, places a ring on the woman's finger, and kisses her."

Captain Bervie changed color and said no more. Mr. Linwood put the next question, in his usual flippant way.

"Who is the happy man?" he asked.

"*You* are the happy man," was the instantaneous reply.

"Who is the woman?" cried Captain Bervie, before Mr. Linwood could speak again.

"The same woman whom I saw before; dressed in the same way, in pale blue."

Captain Bervie was not satisfied. He insisted on receiving clearer information than this. "Surely you can see *something* of her personal appearance?" he said, sharply.

"I can see that she has long dark brown hair falling below her waist. I can see that she has lovely dark brown eyes. Her complexion seems to be all of the same delicate pale color: she has the look of a sensitive, nervous person. She is quite young. I can see no more."

"Is there any other man present in the garden?" was the captain's next question.

"I can see no other man."

"Look again at the man who is putting the ring on her finger. Are you sure that the face you see is the face of Mr. Percy Linwood?"

"I am absolutely sure."

Captain Bervie rose from his chair.

"Thank you, Doctor Lagarde," he said. "I have heard enough."

He walked to the door. Mr. Percy Linwood dropped the doctor's hand, and appealed to the retiring captain with a broad stare of astonishment.

"You don't really believe this?" he said.

"I only say I have heard enough," Captain Bervie answered, irritably.

Mr. Linwood could hardly fail to see that any further attempt to treat the matter lightly might lead to undesirable results. "It is difficult to speak seriously of this kind of exhibition," he resumed, quietly. "But I suppose I may mention a mere matter of fact without meaning or giving offence. The description of the lady, I can positively declare, does not apply in any single particular to any one whom I know."

Captain Bervie turned round sternly at the door, with the look of a man whose patience was completely exhausted. Mr. Linwood's unruffled composure, assisted in its influence by the presence of Madame Lagarde, seemed to remind him of the claims of politeness.

He checked the rash words as they rose to his lips. "You may make new acquaintances, sir," was all that he said. "*You* have the future before you."

Upon that he went out. Percy Linwood waited a little, reflecting on the captain's conduct. Had Dr. Lagarde's description of the lady accidentally answered the description of a living lady whom Captain Bervie knew? Was he by any chance in love with her, and had the doctor innocently reminded him that his love was not returned? Assuming this to be likely, was it also possible that he believed in the duel seen by the mesmerist? Did he seriously interpret his absence from the visionary love scene in the garden as an intimation that he was the duellist who was destined to fall? Nobody but a madman could go to those lengths. The captain's conduct was simply incomprehensible.

Pondering these questions, Percy decided on returning to his place by the doctor's chair. "Of one thing I'm certain, at any rate," he thought to himself. "I'll see the whole imposture out before I leave the house!"

He took Doctor Lagarde's hand. "Now, then, what is the next discovery?" he asked, abruptly. "Anything more about the lady and gentleman in the garden?"

The answer was given in low, languid tones; the sleeper was evidently beginning to suffer from nervous fatigue.

"I see no more of the garden," he said, "or of the persons in it. What I see now, is a small room, like a cottage parlor. The woman who has appeared to me throughout presents herself to me again. But, this time, the man who is with her is no longer Mr. Percy Linwood—the man is Captain Bervie."

Percy smiled satirically. "Good news for the captain!" he said. "It's a thousand pities he went away. If he had waited he would have heard something personally interesting to him. May I ask, Doctor Lagarde, how Captain Bervie and the lady are occupied?"

The sleeper seemed to find some difficulty in answering the question. "I can only see," he said, "that the woman is painfully agitated by something that the captain is saying to her. He puts her arm in his; he seems to be trying to persuade her to leave the room with him. She hesitates; she asks him, with tears, to release her. He whispers something in her ear, which seems to persuade her. She considers; she says a few words on her side; she yields. He leads her out of the room. The darkness gathers behind them. I look and look, and I can see no more."

"Shall we wait a while," Percy suggested, "and then try again?"

Doctor Lagarde sighed, and reclined in his chair. "My head is

heavy," he said; "my spirits are dull. I will try again, to please you. Don't blame me if I fail."

After an interval, Percy put the customary question. The sleeper answered, wearily.

"I see the inside of a travelling carriage," he said. "The lady is one of the persons in it. There is a man with her. There is—" He stopped, and began to breathe heavily; the grasp of his hand relaxed.

"Am I the man this time?" Percy asked. "Or is it Captain Bervie again?"

Doctor Lagarde roused himself, by a last effort, to reply. "I can't tell you," he murmured, drowsily. "My eyes are aching; the darkness baffles me. I have toiled long enough for you. Drop my hand, and leave me to rest."

Hearing those words, Madame Lagarde approached her son's chair.

"It will be useless, sir, to ask him any more questions to-night," she said. "He has been weak and nervous all day, and he is worn out by the effort he has made. Pardon me if I ask you to step aside for a moment, while I give him the repose that he needs."

She laid her right hand gently on the doctor's head, and kept it there for a minute or so. "Are you at rest now?" she asked.

"I am at rest," he answered, in faint, drowsy tones.

Madame Lagarde returned to Percy. "If you are not yet satisfied," she said, "my son will be at your service to-morrow evening, sir."

"Thank you, madam; I have only one more question to ask, and you can no doubt answer it. When your son wakes, will he remember what he has said to Captain Bervie and to myself?"

"My son will be as absolutely ignorant of everything that he has seen, and of everything that he has said, in the trance, as if he had been at the other end of the world."

Percy Linwood swallowed this last outrageous assertion with an effort which he was quite unable to conceal. "Many thanks, madam," he said; "I wish you good-night."

Returning to the waiting-room, he noticed the money-box fixed to the table. "These people look poor," he thought to himself, "and I feel really indebted to them for an amusing evening. Besides, I can afford to be liberal, for I shall certainly never go back." He dropped a five-pound note into the money-box, and left the house.

Walking towards his club, Percy's natural serenity of mind was a little troubled by the remembrance of Captain Bervie's strange language and conduct. Something in the captain's manner, rudely as he had spoken on leaving the room, had interested Percy in spite

of himself. He began to consider the propriety of reducing to writing Doctor Lagarde's description of the scenes in the cottage parlor and the travelling carriage, in the event of another meeting between Captain Bervie and himself. If the captain persisted in taking the thing seriously, the memorandum might additionally enlighten him. If, on the other hand, he ended in adopting the rational view, the memorandum might confirm him in taking that sensible course.

Arrived at his club, Percy resolutely set to work in the writing-room. Unhappily for his chances of success, he was one of that large number of persons whose minds become confused the moment they take a pen in their hands. First, he tried to report the doctor's language literally, and failed to remember it when he put the first words on paper. Then he attempted a brief summary, and lost the thread of his narrative at the second sentence. After spoiling many sheets of paper, and using every new pen within his reach, he gave up the struggle. "It's no use," he said, as he got up from the writing-table. "I am too great a fool to do it, and there's an end of the business."

He never was more mistaken in his life. The end of the business was not to come for many a long day yet.

Part the Second.

THE FULFILMENT.

CHAPTER V.

THE BALL-ROOM.

WHILE the consultation at Doctor Lagarde's was still fresh in the memory of the persons present at it, Chance, or Destiny, occupied in sowing the seeds for the harvest of the future, discovered as one of its fit instruments a retired military officer named Major Much.

The major was a smart little man, who persisted in setting up the appearance of youth as a means of hiding the reality of fifty. After serving with distinction in many parts of the world, Major Much had become an independent man by inheriting an estate in one of the midland counties. Being still a bachelor, and being always ready to make himself agreeable, he was generally popular in the society of women. In the ball-room he was a really welcome addition to the company. The German waltz had then been imported into England little more than three years since. The outcry raised against the dance, by persons skilled in the discovery of latent im-

propriety, had not yet lost its influence in certain quarters. Men who could waltz were scarce. Major Much had successfully grappled with the difficulties of learning the dance in mature life; and the young ladies rewarded him nobly for the effort by taking the appearance of youth for granted in the palpable presence of fifty.

Knowing everybody and being welcome everywhere, playing a good hand at whist, and having an inexhaustible fancy in the invention of a dinner, Major Much naturally belonged to all the best clubs of his time. Percy Linwood and he constantly met in the billiard-room or at the dinner-table. The major approved of the easy, handsome, pleasant-tempered young man. "I have lost the first freshness of youth," he used to say, modestly, of himself, "and I see it revived, as it were, in Percy. Naturally I like Percy."

About three weeks after the memorable evening at Doctor Lagarde's, the two friends encountered each other on the steps of a club.

"Got anything to do to-night?" asked the major.

"Nothing that I know of," said Percy, "unless I go to the theatre."

"Let the theatre wait, my boy. My old regiment gives a ball at Woolwich to-night. I have got a ticket to spare, and I know several sweet girls who are going. Some of them waltz, Percy! Gather your rosebuds while you may. Come with me."

The invitation was accepted as readily as it was given. The major found the carriage, and Percy paid for the post-horses. They entered the ball-room among the earlier guests; and the first person whom they met, waiting near the door, was—Captain Bervie.

Percy bowed, a little uneasily. "I feel some doubt," he said, laughing, "whether we have been properly introduced to each other or not."

"Not properly introduced!" cried Major Much. "I'll set that right. My dear friend, Percy Linwood; my dear friend, Arthur Bervie—be known to each other; esteem each other!"

Captain Bervie acknowledged the introduction by a cold salute. Percy, yielding to the good-natured impulse of the moment, began to speak of the mesmeric consultation.

"You missed something worth hearing when you left the doctor the other night," he said. "We continued the sitting; and *you* turned up again among the persons of the doctor's drama in quite a new character. Imagine yourself, if you please, in a cottage parlor—"

"Excuse me for interrupting you," said Captain Bervie. "I am a member of the committee charged with the arrangements of the ball, and I must really attend to my duties."

He withdrew without waiting for a reply. Percy looked round wonderingly at Major Much. "Strange!" he said. "I feel rather attracted towards Captain Bervie; and he seems so little attracted, on his side, that he can hardly behave to me with common civility. What does it mean?"

"I'll tell you," answered the major, confidentially. "Arthur Bervie is madly in love—madly is really the word, my boy—with a Miss Bowmore. And (this is between ourselves) the young lady doesn't feel it quite in the same way. A sweet girl; I've often had her on my knee when she was a child. Her father and mother are old friends of mine. She is coming to the ball to-night. That's the true reason why Arthur left you just now. Look at him—waiting to be the first to speak to her. If he could have his way, he wouldn't let another man come near the poor girl all through the evening; he really persecutes her. I'll introduce you, Percy; and you will see how he looks at us for presuming to approach her. It's a great pity; she will never marry him. Arthur Bervie is a high-minded, honorable fellow, a man in a thousand; but he's fast becoming a perfect bear under the strain on his temper. What's the matter? You don't seem to be listening to me."

This last remark was perfectly justified. In telling the captain's love story, Major Much had revived his young friend's memory of the lady in the blue dress, who had haunted the mesmeric visions of Doctor Lagarde. "Tell me," said Percy, "what is Miss Bowmore like? Is there anything remarkable in her personal appearance? I have a reason for asking."

As he spoke, there arose among the guests in the rapidly filling ball-room a low murmur of surprise and admiration. The major laid one hand on Percy's shoulder, and lifting the other, pointed to the door.

"What is Miss Bowmore like?" he repeated. "There she is, my boy! Let her answer for herself."

Percy turned towards the lower end of the room. A young lady was entering, dressed in plain silk, and the color of it was a pale blue! Excepting a white rose at her breast, she wore no ornament of any sort. Doubly distinguished by the perfect simplicity of her apparel and by her tall, supple, commanding figure, she took rank at once as the most remarkable woman in the room. Moving nearer to her through the crowd, under the guidance of the complaisant major, young Linwood gained a clearer view of her hair, her complexion, and the color of her eyes. In every one of these particulars she was the living image of the woman described by Doctor Lagarde!

While Percy was absorbed over this strange discovery, Major

Much had got within speaking distance of the young lady and of her mother, as they stood together in conversation with Captain Bervie. "My dear Mrs. Bowmore, how well you are looking! My dear Miss Charlotte, what a sensation you have made already!" cried the cordial little man. "The glorious simplicity (if I may so express myself) of your dress is—is—what was I going to say?—the ideas come thronging on me; I merely want words."

Here Major Much waved his hand, with all the fingers well open, as if words were circulating in the air of the room, and he meant to catch them. Miss Charlotte burst into a little silvery laugh; her magnificent brown eyes, wandering from the major to Percy, rested on the young man with a modest and momentary interest, which Captain Bervie's jealous attention instantly detected.

"They are forming the dance, Miss Bowmore," he said, pressing forward impatiently. "If we don't take our places, we shall be too late."

"Stop! stop!" cried the major. "There is a time for everything, and this is the time for presenting my dear friend here, Mr. Percy Linwood. He is like me, Miss Charlotte—he has been struck by the glorious simplicity, and *he* wants words." At this part of the presentation he happened to look towards the irate captain, and instantly gave him a hint on the subject of his temper. "I say, Arthur Bervie, we are all good-humored people here. What have you got on your eyebrows? It looks like a frown, and it doesn't become you. Send for a skilled waiter, and have it brushed off and taken away directly!"

"May I ask, Miss Bowmore, if you are disengaged for the next dance?" said Percy, the moment the major gave him an opportunity of speaking.

"Miss Bowmore is engaged to *me* for the next dance," said the angry captain, before the young lady could answer.

"The third dance, then?" Percy persisted, in his quietest manner, and with his brightest smile.

"With pleasure, Mr. Linwood," said Miss Bowmore. She would have been no true woman if she had not resented the open exhibition of Arthur's jealousy; it was like asserting a right over her to which he had not the shadow of a claim. She threw a look at Percy as her partner led her away, which was the severest punishment she could inflict on the man who ardently loved her.

The third dance stood in the programme as a waltz. In jealous distrust of Percy, the captain took the conductor aside, and used his authority as committee-man to substitute another dance. He had no sooner turned his back on the orchestra than the wife of the colonel of the regiment, who had heard him, spoke to the conductor

in her turn, and insisted on the original programme being retained. "Quote the colonel's authority," said the lady, "if Captain Bervie ventures to object." In the mean time the captain (on his way to rejoin Charlotte) was met by one of his brother officers, who summoned him to an impending debate of the committee charged with the administrative arrangements of the supper-table.

"Surely they can do without me?" Arthur suggested.

"No," said the officer. "In case of any difference of opinion, the colonel requests that all the committee will attend."

Under these circumstances Arthur had no alternative but to follow his brother officer to the committee-room. Barely a minute later the conductor appeared at his desk, and the first notes of the music rose low and plaintive, introducing the third dance.

"Percy, my boy!" cried the major, recognizing the melody, "you're in luck's way—it's going to be a waltz!"

Almost as he spoke, the low, plaintive notes glided by subtle modulations into the inspiring air of the waltz. Percy claimed his partner's hand. Miss Charlotte hesitated, and looked at her mother.

"Surely you waltz?" said Percy.

"I have learned to waltz," she answered, modestly; "but this is such a large room, sir, and there are so many people."

"Once round," Percy pleaded; "only once round."

She looked again at her mother; her foot was keeping time with the music, under her dress; her heart was beating with a delicious excitement. Kind-hearted Mrs. Bowmore smiled, and said, "Once round, my dear, as Mr. Linwood suggests."

In another moment Percy's arm took possession of her waist, and they were away on the wings of the waltz! Could words describe, could thought realize, the exquisite enjoyment of the dance? Enjoyment? It was more—it was an epoch in Charlotte's life—it was the first time she had waltzed with a man. What a difference between the fervent clasp of Percy's arm and the cold, formal contact of the mistress who had taught her! How brightly his eyes looked down into hers, admiring her with such a tender restraint that there could surely be no harm in looking up at him now and then in return. Round and round they glided, absorbed in the music and in themselves. Occasionally her bosom just touched his, at those critical moments when she was most in need of support. At other intervals she almost let her head sink on his shoulder in trying to hide from him the smile which acknowledged his admiration too boldly. "Once round," Percy had suggested; "once round," her mother had said. They had been twenty, thirty, forty times round; they had never stopped to rest, like the other dancers; they had had the eyes of the whole room on them—including the eyes of Captain

Bervie—without knowing it; her delicately pale complexion had changed to rosy red; the neat arrangement of her hair had become disturbed; her bosom was rising and falling faster and faster in the effort to breathe—before the fatigue and the heat overpowered her at last, and forced her to say to him, faintly, “I’m very sorry—I can’t dance any more.”

Percy led her into the cooler atmosphere of the refreshment-room, and revived her with a glass of lemonade. Her arm still rested on his—she was just about to thank him for the care he had taken of her—when Captain Bervie entered the room. He was pale, with the marked and sinister pallor of suppressed rage; but when he spoke to Percy he still preserved his self-control, and expressed himself with scrupulous politeness.

“Mrs. Bowmore wishes me to take you back to her,” he said to Charlotte. Then, turning to Percy, he added, “Will you kindly wait here while I take Miss Bowmore to the ball-room? I have a word to say to you—I will return directly.”

Left alone in the refreshment-room, Percy sat down to cool and rest himself. With his experience of the ways of men, he felt no surprise at the marked contrast between Captain Bervie’s face and Captain Bervie’s manner. “He has seen us waltzing, and he is coming back to pick a quarrel with me.” Such was the interpretation which Mr. Linwood’s knowledge of the world placed on Captain Bervie’s politeness. In a minute or two more the captain returned to the refreshment-room, and satisfied Percy that his anticipations had not deceived him.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE AND POLITICS.

It was the fourth day after the ball. Though it was no later in the year than the month of February, the sun was shining brightly, and the air was as soft as the air of a day in spring. Percy and Charlotte were walking together in the little garden at the back of Mr. Bowmore’s cottage, near the town of Dartford, in Kent.

“Mr. Linwood,” said Charlotte, “you were to have paid us your first visit the day after the ball. Why have you kept us waiting? Have you been too busy to remember your new friends?”

“I have counted the hours since we parted, Miss Charlotte. If I had not been detained by business—”

“I understand. For three days business has controlled you. On the fourth day you have controlled business—and here you are?”

"That's it exactly, Miss Charlotte."

"I don't believe one word of it, Mr. Percy!"

There was no answering such a declaration as this. Guiltily conscious that Charlotte was right in refusing to accept his well-worn excuse, Percy made an awkward attempt to change the topic of conversation. They happened, at the moment, to be standing near a small conservatory at the end of the garden. The glass door was closed, and the few plants and shrubs inside had a lonely, neglected look. "Does nobody ever visit this secluded place?" Percy asked, jocosely; "or does it hide discoveries in the rearing of plants which are forbidden mysteries to a stranger?"

"Satisfy your curiosity, Mr. Linwood, by all means," Charlotte answered, in the same tone. "Open the door, and I will follow you. There is a bench still left, I think, inside, and a few minutes' rest will be welcome to me."

Percy obeyed. In passing through the door-way he encountered the bare, hanging branches of some creeping plant long since dead, and detached from its fastenings on the wood-work of the roof. He pushed aside the branches so that Charlotte could easily follow him in, without being aware that his own forced passage through them had a little deranged the folds of spotless white cambric which a well-dressed gentleman wore round his neck in those days. Charlotte seated herself on the bench, and directed Percy's attention to the desolate conservatory with a saucy smile.

"The mystery which your lively imagination has associated with this place," she said, "means, being interpreted, that we are too poor to keep a gardener. Make the best of your disappointment, Mr. Linwood, and sit here by me. We are out of hearing and out of sight of mamma's other visitors. You have no excuse now for not satisfying my curiosity, and telling me what has really kept you away from us."

She fixed her eyes on him as she said those words. Before Percy could think of another excuse, her quick observation detected the disordered condition of his cravat, and discovered the upper edge of a black plaster attached to one side of his neck. "You have been hurt in the neck!" she exclaimed. "That is why you have kept away from us for the last three days!"

"A mere trifle," said Percy, in great confusion; "please don't notice it."

She neither heeded nor heard him. Her eyes, still resting on his face, assumed an expression of suspicious inquiry which Percy was entirely at a loss to understand. Suddenly she started to her feet, as if a new idea had occurred to her. "Wait here," she said, flushing with excitement, "till I come back; I insist on it!"

Before Percy could ask for an explanation she had left the conservatory.

In a minute or two she returned, with a newspaper in her hand. "Read that," she said, pointing to a paragraph distinguished by a line drawn round it in ink.

The passage that she indicated contained an account of a duel which had recently taken place in the neighborhood of London. The names of the duellists were not mentioned. One was described as an officer and the other as a civilian. They had quarrelled at cards, and had fought with pistols. The civilian had had a narrow escape of his life. His antagonist's bullet had passed near enough to the side of his neck to tear the flesh, and had missed the vital parts, literally, by a hair's-breadth.

Charlotte's eyes, riveted on Percy, detected a sudden change of color in his face the moment he looked at the newspaper. That was enough for her. "You *are* the man!" she exclaimed. "Oh, for shame! for shame! To risk your life for a paltry dispute about cards."

"I would risk it again," said Percy, "to hear you speak as if you set some value on it."

She looked away from him quickly without a word of reply. Her mind seemed to be busy again with its own thoughts. Did she meditate returning to the subject of the duel? Was she not satisfied with the discovery which she had just made? No such doubts as these troubled the mind of Percy Linwood. Intoxicated by the charm of her presence, emboldened by her innocent betrayal of the interest that she felt in him, he opened his whole heart to her as unreservedly as if they had known each other from the days of their childhood. There was but one excuse for him. Charlotte was his first love.

"You don't know how completely you have become a part of my life since we met at the ball," he went on. "That one delightful dance seemed, by some magic which I can't explain, to draw us together in a few minutes as if we had known each other for years. Oh, dear! I could make such a confession of what I felt only I am afraid of offending you by speaking too soon! Women are so dreadfully difficult to understand. How is a man to know at what time it is considerate towards them to conceal his true feelings, and at what time it is equally considerate to express his true feelings? One doesn't know whether it is a matter of days or weeks or months—there ought to be a law to settle it. Dear Miss Charlotte, when a poor fellow loves you at first sight as he has never loved any other woman, and when he is tormented by the fear that some other man may be preferred to him, can't you forgive him if he lets out the

truth a little too soon?" He ventured, as he put that very downright question, to take her hand. "It really isn't my fault," he said, simply. "My heart is so full of you I can talk of nothing else."

To Percy's surprise, the first experimental pressure of his hand, far from being resented, was suddenly returned. Charlotte looked at him again, with a new resolution in her face.

"I'll forgive you for talking nonsense, Mr. Linwood," she said, "and I will even permit you to come and see me again, on one condition—that you tell the whole truth about the duel. If you conceal the smallest circumstance, our acquaintance is at an end."

"Haven't I owned everything already?" Percy inquired, in great perplexity. "Did I say No when you told me I was the man?"

"Could you say No with that plaster on your neck?" was the ready rejoinder. "I am determined to know more than the newspaper tells me. Will you declare, on your word of honor, that Captain Bervie had nothing to do with the duel? Can you look me in the face and say that the real cause of the quarrel was a disagreement at cards? What did you say when you were talking with me just before I left the ball, and when a gentleman asked you to make one at the whist table? You said, 'I don't play at cards.' Ah! You thought I had forgotten that? Don't kiss my hand. Trust me with the whole truth, or say good-bye forever."

"Only tell me what you wish to know, Miss Charlotte," said Percy, humbly. "If you will put the questions, I will give the answers—as well as I can."

On this understanding, Percy's evidence was extracted from him as follows:

"Was it Captain Bervie who quarrelled with you?" "Yes."—"Was it about me?" "Yes."—"What did he say?" "He said I had committed an impropriety in waltzing with you."—"Why?" "Because your parents disapproved of your waltzing in a public ball-room."—"That's not true. What did he say next?" "He said I had added tenfold to my offence by waltzing with you in such a manner as to make you the subject of remark to the whole room."—"Oh! did you let him say that?" "No; I contradicted him instantly. And I said, besides, 'It's an insult to Miss Bowmore to suppose that she would permit any impropriety.'"—"Quite right. And what did he say?" "Well, he lost his temper; I would rather not repeat what he said, when he was mad with jealousy. There was nothing to be done with him but to give him his way."—"Give him his way! Does that mean fight a duel with him?" "Yes."—"And you kept my name out of it by pretending to quarrel at the card-table?" "Yes. We man-

aged it when the card-room was emptying at supper-time, and nobody was present but Major Much and another friend as witnesses."—"And when did you fight the duel?" "The next morning."—"You never thought of *me*, I suppose?" "Indeed I did; I was very glad that you had no suspicion of what we were at."—"Was that all?" "No; I had your flower with me, the flower you gave me out of your nosegay at the ball."—"Well?" "Oh, never mind; it doesn't matter."—"It does matter. What did you do with my flower?" "I gave it a sly kiss while they were measuring the ground, and (don't tell anybody!) I put it next to my heart to bring me luck."—"Was that just before he shot at you?" "Yes."—"How did he shoot?" "He walked (as the seconds had arranged it) ten paces forward, and then he stopped and lifted his pistol—"—"Don't tell me any more! Oh, to think of my being the miserable cause of such horrors! I'll never dance again as long as I live. Did you think he had killed you when the bullet wounded your poor neck?" "No; I hardly felt it at first."—"Hardly felt it? How he talks! And when the wretch had done his best to kill you, and when it came to your turn, what did you do?" "Nothing."—"What! You didn't walk your ten paces forward?" "No."—"And you never shot at him in return?" "No; I had no quarrel with him, poor fellow; I just stood where I was, and fired in the air—"

The next words died away on his lips. Before he could stop her, Charlotte seized his hand, and kissed it with a hysterical fervor of admiration which completely deprived him of his presence of mind.

"Why shouldn't I kiss the hand of a hero?" she cried, with tears of enthusiasm sparkling in her eyes. "Nobody but a hero would have given him his life; nobody but a hero would have pardoned him while the blood was streaming from the wound that he had inflicted. I respect you; I admire you. Oh, don't think me bold!" she exclaimed, suddenly hiding her face in her hands. "I can't control myself when I hear of anything noble and good. You will make allowance for my being a strange girl? You will understand me better when we get to be old friends."

She spoke in low, sweet tones of entreaty. Percy's arm stole softly round her waist.

"Are we never to be nearer and dearer to each other than old friends?" he asked, in a whisper. "I am not a hero—your goodness overrates me, dear Miss Charlotte. My one ambition is to be the happy man who is worthy enough to win *you*. At your own time! I wouldn't distress you; I wouldn't confuse you; I wouldn't for the whole world take advantage of the compliment which your sympathy has paid to me. If it offends you, I won't even ask if I may hope."

She sighed as he said the last words, trembled a little, and then

silently looked at him. Percy read his answer in her eyes. Without meaning it on either side, their heads drew nearer together; their cheeks, then their lips, touched. She started back from him, and rose to leave the conservatory. At the same moment the sound of slowly approaching footsteps became audible on the gravel-walk of the garden. Charlotte hurried to the door. "It is my father," she said, turning to Percy. "Come and be introduced to him."

Percy followed her into the garden.

Charlotte had inherited all that was most striking in her personal appearance from her mother. So far as the question of stature was concerned, her father was no taller than Major Much. Judging by appearances, Mr. Bowmore looked like a man prematurely wasted and worn by the cares of a troubled life. His eyes presented the one feature in which his daughter resembled him. In shape and color they were exactly reproduced in Charlotte; the difference was in the expression. The father's look was habitually restless, eager, and suspicious: not a trace was to be seen in it of the truthfulness and gentleness which made the charm of the daughter's expression. A man whose bitter experience of the world had soured his temper and shaken his faith in his fellow-creatures—such was Mr. Bowmore as he presented himself on the surface. Whatever compensating virtues he might possess lay hidden deep in his nature, and were only discoverable by those who knew him in the closest relations of daily life.

He received Percy politely, but with a preoccupied air. Every now and then his restless eyes wandered from his visitor to an open letter which he had in his hand. Charlotte, observing him, pointed to the letter. "Have you any bad news there, papa?" she asked.

"Dreadful news!" Mr. Bowmore answered. "Dreadful news, my child, to every Englishman who respects the liberties which his ancestors won. My correspondent is a man who is in the confidence of the ministers," he continued, addressing Percy. "What do you think, sir, is the remedy that the government proposes for the universal distress among the population caused by an infamous and needless war? We are now at the 17th of February. In a week's time (I have it on the authority of my correspondent) ministers will bring in a bill for suspending the Habeas Corpus Act!" He struck the letter with his open hand; his eyes brightened with indignation as they rested on Percy's face. "I don't know what your politics may be, sir. As an English citizen you can hardly hear that the Parliament of England is about to change the free government of this country into an absolute despotism without *some* feeling of indignation and alarm!"

Before Percy could answer, Charlotte put a question to her father which appeared to amaze and distress him.

"What is the Habeas Corpus Act?" she asked.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Bowmore, "is it possible that a child of mine has grown up to womanhood in ignorance of the palladium of English liberty? Oh, Charlotte! Charlotte!"

"I am very sorry, papa. If you will only tell me I will never forget it."

Mr. Bowmore reverently uncovered his head; he took his daughter by the hand with a certain parental sternness; his voice trembled with emotion as he spoke his next words:

"The Habeas Corpus Act, my child, forbids the imprisonment of an English subject, unless that imprisonment can be justified by law. Not even the order of the reigning monarch, not even the authority of the highest court in the country, can prevent us from appearing before the judges of the land, and summoning them to declare whether our committal to prison is legally just."

He put on his hat again. "Never forget what I have told you, Charlotte," he said, solemnly. "I would not remove my hat, sir," he continued, turning to Percy, "in the presence of the proudest autocrat that ever sat on a throne. I uncover in homage to the grand law which asserts the sacredness of human liberty. You are perhaps too young to know by experience what will happen if this infamous bill is sanctioned by Parliament. I can tell you what did happen when the Habeas Corpus was suspended in England at the end of the last century. The friends of liberty were liable to imprisonment, and even to death on the scaffold, on warrants privately obtained by the paid spies and informers of government, from justices who were the humble servants of the terrified ministry of the time. The same horrors will be repeated in a few weeks more, unless the people can force Parliament to defend their liberties. Does my indignation surprise you, Mr. Linwood? Are you, in these dreadful times, a lukewarm person who takes no interest in placing a really liberal government in power?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bowmore," Percy interposed. "I have reasons for feeling the strongest interest in supporting a liberal government."

"What reasons?" cried Mr. Bowmore, eagerly.

"My late father had a claim on government," Percy answered, "for money expended in foreign service. As his heir I inherit the claim, which has been formally recognized by the present ministry. My petition for a settlement (long since due) will be presented at the opening of Parliament by friends of mine who can advocate my interests in the House of Commons."

Mr. Bowmore took Percy's hand and shook it warmly.

"In such a matter as this you cannot have too many friends to help you," he said. "I myself have some influence, as representing opinion outside the House, and I am entirely at your service. Come to-morrow, and let us talk over the details of your claim at my humble dinner-table. To-day I must attend a meeting of the Branch Hampden Club, of which I am vice-president, and to which I am bound to communicate the alarming news which my letter contains. In my little garden here," proceeded Mr. Bowmore, waving his hand over his modest property, "I am accustomed to consider the main points of my speeches at the club, in the necessary retirement. I have made some remarkable bursts of eloquence on this walk. Will you excuse me for to-day? and will you honor us with your company to-morrow?"

If Percy had not been in love he might have felt some surprise at Mr. Bowmore's extraordinary devotion to his interests after an acquaintance of about ten minutes' duration. As things were, the proposed meeting on the next day offered him an opportunity of seeing Charlotte again; and on that account alone he unhesitatingly accepted the invitation. Mr. Bowmore honored him with another squeeze of his patriotic hand, and withdrew to meditate new bursts of eloquence in the suggestive solitude of the garden walk.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WARNING.

"I HOPE you like my father," said Charlotte, as she and Percy turned in the direction of the cottage. "He is such a great politician; we are so fond of him and so proud of him! All our friends say he ought to be in Parliament. He has tried twice. The expenses were dreadful, and each time the other man defeated him. The agent says he would be certainly elected if he tried again; but there is no money, and we mustn't think of it."

A man of a suspicious turn of mind might have discovered in those artless words the secret of Mr. Bowmore's interest in the success of his young friend's claim on the government. One British subject with a sum of ready money at his command may be an inestimably useful person to another British subject (without ready money) who cannot sit comfortably unless he sits in Parliament! But honest Percy Linwood was not a man of a suspicious turn of mind. He only echoed Charlotte's filial glorification of her father, and Charlotte rewarded him by a smile and a look.

Just as they reached the garden entrance to the cottage, a shabbily

dressed man-servant met them with a message, for which they were both alike unprepared : "Captain Bervie has called, miss, to say good-bye, and my mistress requests your company in the parlor."

Having delivered his little formula of words, the man cast a look of furtive curiosity at Percy and withdrew. Charlotte turned to her lover, with indignation sparkling in her eyes and flushing on her cheeks at the bare idea of seeing Captain Bervie again. "The wretch!" she exclaimed. "Does he think I will breathe the same air with the man who attempted to take your life?"

Percy checked the flow of her anger by taking her hand and looking at her gravely.

"You are sadly mistaken," he said; "and I am glad of the opportunity of setting you right. Captain Bervie stood to receive my fire as fairly as I stood to receive his. When I discharged my pistol in the air, he was the first man who ran up to me, and asked if I was seriously hurt. They told him my wound was a trifle, and he fell on his knees and thanked God for preserving my life from 'his guilty and miserable hand.' I myself saw the tears streaming down his cheeks. He said to me, 'You have shown me my vile temper as I have never seen it yet. I will get the better of it—I will go away somewhere by myself, and not return until my mind is purified from every feeling of hatred and jealousy towards the man who has forgiven me and spared my life.' He was not content with only making that promise—he held out his hand to me. 'I am no longer the rival who hates you,' he said. 'Give me a little time and I will be *your* brother and *her* brother. Am I worthy to take your hand?' We shook hands—we were friends. Whatever his faults may be, Charlotte, Arthur Bervie has a great heart. Go in, I entreat you, and be friends with him, as I am."

Charlotte listened with downcast eyes and changing color. "You believe him?" she asked, in low, trembling tones.

"I believe him as I believe you," Percy answered.

She secretly resented the comparison; she detested the captain more heartily than ever. "I will go in and see him, if you wish it," she said, with a sad submission in her voice. "But not by myself. I want you to come with me."

"Why?" Percy asked.

"I want to see his face when you and he meet."

"Do you still doubt him, Charlotte?"

She looked up suddenly, and made this strange reply,

"*Your* mind sees him penitent, on his knees. *My* mind sees him pointing his pistol to take your life."

They went together into the cottage. Fixing her eyes steadily on the captain's face, Charlotte saw it turn deadly pale when Percy fol-

lowed her into the parlor. The two men greeted each other cordially. Charlotte sat down by her mother, preserving her composure so far as appearances went. "I hear you have called to bid us good-bye," she said to Bervie. "Is it to be a long absence?"

"I have got two months' leave," the captain answered, without looking at her while he spoke.

"Are you going abroad?"

"Yes; I think so."

A pause followed that reply. Percy claimed the captain's attention by speaking to him next. Charlotte seized the opportunity of saying a word privately to her mother. "Don't encourage Captain Bervie to prolong his visit," she whispered; "I like him less than ever."

Mrs. Bowmore, born and bred in the exercise of that patient politeness which has long since been reckoned among obsolete social accomplishments, was shocked at her daughter's inhospitable suggestion. In the confusion of the moment the good lady actually interrupted Captain Bervie's conversation with his friend by offering him a cup of tea. He rose as he thanked her, and made the customary apologies for not prolonging his visit. To Charlotte's surprise, Percy also rose to go. "His carriage," he said, "was waiting at the door, and he had offered to take Captain Bervie back to London." Charlotte instantly suspected an arrangement between the two men for a confidential interview. Her obstinate distrust of Bervie strengthened tenfold. She reluctantly gave him her hand as he parted from her at the parlor door. The effort of concealing her true feeling towards him gave a color and a vivacity to her face which made her irresistibly beautiful. Bervie looked at her with an immeasurable sadness in his eyes. "When we meet again," he said, "you will see me in a new character." He hurried out to the gate without waiting to be answered, as if he feared to trust himself for a moment longer in her presence.

Percy took his leave next. Charlotte followed him into the passage. "I shall be here to-morrow, dearest," he said, and tried to raise her hand to his lips. She abruptly drew it away. "Not that hand!" she answered. "Captain Bervie has just touched it. Kiss the other!"

"Do you still doubt the captain?" said Percy, amused by her petulance.

She put her arm over his shoulder and touched the plaster on his neck gently with her finger. "I don't doubt," she said, "the captain did *that*!"

Percy left her, laughing. He was too happy to remonstrate seriously with her at that moment. At the front gate of the cottage he

found Arthur Bervie in conversation with the same shabbily dressed man-servant who had announced the captain's visit to Charlotte.

"What has become of the other servant?" Bervie asked. "I mean the old man who has been with Mr. Bowmore for so many years."

"He has left his situation, sir."

"Why?"

"As I understand, sir, he spoke disrespectfully to the master."

"Oh! And how came the master to hear of *you*?"

"I advertised, and Mr. Bowmore answered my advertisement."

Bervie looked hard at the man for a moment, and then joined Percy at the carriage door. The two gentlemen started for London.

"Did you notice Mr. Bowmore's new servant?" asked the captain, as they drove away from the cottage. "I don't like the look of the fellow."

"I didn't particularly notice him," Percy answered.

There was a pause. When the conversation was resumed it turned on commonplace subjects. The captain looked uneasily out of the carriage window. Percy looked uneasily at the captain.

They had left Dartford about two miles behind them when Percy noticed an old gabled house, sheltered by magnificent trees, and standing on an eminence well removed from the high-road. Carriages and saddle-horses were visible on the drive in front, and a flag was hoisted on a staff placed in the middle of the lawn.

"Something seems to be going on there," Percy remarked. "What a fine old house. Who does it belong to?"

Bervie smiled. "It belongs to my father," he said, simply. "He is chairman of the bench of local magistrates, and he receives his brother justices to-day to celebrate the opening of the sessions." He stopped and looked at Percy with a certain embarrassment. "I am afraid I have surprised and disappointed you," he resumed, abruptly changing the subject. "I told you when we met just now at Mr. Bowmore's that I had something important to say to you, and I have not yet said it. The truth is, I don't feel sure, on reflection, whether I have been long enough your friend to take the liberty of advising you."

"You mean kindly towards me," Percy answered, in his frank, hearty way. "Trust me, whatever your advice is, to take it kindly on my side."

Thus encouraged, the captain spoke out.

"You told me that you had been introduced to Mr. Bowmore to-day," he began; "and you said that he took a great interest in the success of your claim on the government. You will probably pass

much of your time at the cottage, and you will be thrown a great deal into Mr. Bowmore's society. I have known him for many years. Speaking from that knowledge, I most seriously warn you against him as a thoroughly unprincipled and thoroughly dangerous man. Without entering into the question of his politics, I can tell you that the motive of everything he says and does is vanity—inordinate, devouring vanity. To the gratification of that one passion he would sacrifice you or me, his wife or his daughter, without hesitation and without remorse. His one desire is to get into Parliament. You are a wealthy man, and you can help him. He will leave no effort untried to make you help him; and if he gets you into political difficulties, he will desert you without scruple. I see I astonish and shock you. If you think me prejudiced, write to my father, who has official knowledge of the perilous position in which this man stands. I will forward your letter, and vouch for you as a gentleman who will respect any confidence placed in him. My father will confirm me when I tell you that this Bowmore belongs to some of the most revolutionary clubs in England, that he has spoken rank sedition at public meetings, and that his name is already in the black book at the Home Office. If the rumor be true that ministers, in fear of insurrectionary risings among the population, are about to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act, Mr. Bowmore will certainly be in danger; and it may be my father's duty to grant the warrant that apprehends him. In your own best interests decline resolutely to join him in any political conversation, refuse to accept his assistance in the matter of your claim on Parliament, and, above all things, stop him at the outset when he tries to steal his way into your intimacy. I need not caution you to say nothing against him to his wife and daughter. They are infatuated about him; his wily tongue has long since deluded them. Don't let it delude *you*! If you were my brother, I could give you no sounder or better advice than this. Reflect on what I have said at your leisure, and let us turn in the mean time to a more interesting subject. Have you thought any more of our evening at Doctor Lagarde's?"

"I hardly know," said Percy, still under the impression of the formidable warning which he had just received. "You have given me far more serious things to think of than mesmerism."

"Let me jog your memory," the other continued. "You went on with the consultation by yourself after I had left the doctor's house. It will be really doing me a favor if you can call to mind what Lagarde saw in the trance in my absence?"

Thus entreated, Percy roused himself. So long as he abstained from attempting to express them in writing, his recollections were

perfectly ready to answer any reasonable call on them. He repeated in substance the doctor's description of the first of the two visions that had appeared to him after the captain's departure.

Bervie started. "A cottage parlor?" he repeated. "We have just left a cottage parlor! A man like me, trying to persuade a woman like—" he checked himself, as if he was afraid to let Charlotte's name pass his lips—"trying to induce a woman to go away with me," he resumed, "and persuading her at last in spite of her tears? Pray go on. What did the doctor see next?"

"He saw a travelling carriage," Percy replied. "The lady was one of the persons in it. And there was a man with her. And there was something else—only the doctor couldn't see it."

"Could he tell you who the man was?"

"No. He was too much exhausted, he said, to see any more."

"Surely you returned to consult him again?"

"No. I had had enough of it."

"When we get to London," said the captain, "we shall pass along the Strand, on the way to your chambers. Will you kindly drop me at the turning that leads to the doctor's?"

Percy looked at him in amazement. "You still take it seriously?" he said.

"Is it *not* serious?" Bervie asked, warmly. "Have you and I, so far, not done exactly what this man saw us doing? Have I not shed bitter tears of disappointment? and who was the cause of them but the woman whom he saw by my side? Did we not meet, in the days when we were rivals (as he saw us meet), with the pistols in our hands? Did you not recognize his description of the lady when you met her at the ball, as I recognized it before you?"

"Mere coincidences," Percy answered, quoting Charlotte's opinion, when they had spoken together of Doctor Lagarde, but taking care not to cite his authority. "How many thousand men have been crossed in love? How many thousand men have fought duels for love? How many thousand women choose blue for their color, and answer to the vague description of the lady whom the doctor pretended to see?"

"Say that is so," Bervie rejoined. "The thing is remarkable even from your point of view. And if more coincidences follow, the result will be more remarkable still."

The next coincidence, if it happened, would realize the love scene with the ring. Was there anything remarkable—was it even worth calling a coincidence—if Percy put an engagement ring on the finger of the woman who loved him, and if he kissed her afterwards? He considerably forebore, in this case, from communicating his thoughts to Bervie. "The thing that most surprised *me* in the doctor's per-

formance," he said, "was his thinking with our thoughts, and finding out our own knowledge of our own names."

The captain shook his head. "A mere question of nervous sympathy and nervous insight," he answered. "Doctors meet with similar cases in cataleptic patients. I have seen them recorded in medical books."

Percy declined to follow his friend into the mysteries of medical literature. Arrived at the Strand, he set Bervie down at the turning which led to the doctor's lodgings. "You will call on me or write me word, if anything remarkable happens," he said.

"You shall hear from me without fail," Bervie replied.

That night the captain's pen performed the captain's promise, in few and startling words.

"Melancholy news! Madame Legarde is dead. Nothing is known of her son but that he has left England. If he has ventured back to France, it is barely possible that I may hear something of him. I have friends at the English embassy in Paris who will help me to make inquiries; and I start for the Continent to-morrow. Write to me while I am away, to the care of my father, at 'The Manor House, near Dartford.' He will always know my address abroad, and will forward your letters. For your own sake, remember the warning I gave you this afternoon! Your faithful friend, A. B."

CHAPTER VIII.

OFFICIAL SECRETS.

"FROM PETER WEEMS TO JOHN JENNET, ESQ.,

"Secret Service Department, Home Office.

"Private and confidential.*

"THE COTTAGE, DARTFORD, *February 24, 1817.*

"SIR,—I beg to inform you that there is no fear of my being compelled to leave my situation as servant in Mr. Bowmore's house, before I have completed the private investigations committed to my charge. The attempt made by Mrs. Bowmore and her daughter to have the old servant forgiven and taken back again has failed. He presumed, it seems, on his long and faithful service to warn the mas-

* Persons desirous of consulting the author's authority for passages which relate to the social and political condition of England at the date of the story, are referred to the *Annual Register* for the year 1817. In Chapters I. and II. they will find the Reports of the Secret Committees and the Debates in Parliament, which led to the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act. Farther on, at page 66, they will also find the employment of paid spies and informers by the English government openly acknowledged in the House of Lords, and openly defended in the speeches of Lord Redesdale and Lord Liverpool.

ter that his political opinions might get him into trouble. Mr. Bowmore positively refuses to forgive the liberty that his servant has taken with him. I am accordingly left in possession of the footman's place, and not the slightest suspicion is felt of my true errand in the house.

"My note-book contains nothing relating to the past week, mainly in consequence of the visits here of one Mr. Percy Linwood, which have a little disturbed the domestic routine. This gentleman's avowed object is to pay his court to Miss Bowmore. Whether he is, politically speaking, a person of any importance, I have yet to discover. Judging by appearances, though perfectly respectful to Mr. Bowmore, he is not particularly desirous of cultivating the society of his future father-in-law. Mr. Bowmore perceives this, and resents it. He has turned sulky, and for once he keeps his thoughts to himself. There was a family discussion on the subject of Mr. Linwood the other day, which is of no official interest so far. If it leads to anything, I will not fail to send you the necessary particulars.

"*March 3.*—The family discussion *has* led to something.

"At Mr. Linwood's next visit the young lady (Miss Charlotte) had a long talk with him on the subject of his behavior to her father. They usually meet in the conservatory; I have broken a pane of glass at the back, and I can hear everything they say. The lady accused her lover of being set against her father by some slanderer. As her anger rose, she did not scruple to guess at the slanderer's name. She mentioned no less a person than Captain Bervie, son of Justice Bervie, of the Manor House. Mr. Linwood's defence was but a poor one; he could only declare that she was mistaken. She refused to believe this, and it ended in her giving him his dismissal, in these plain words. 'You distrust my father, and you refuse to admit me into your confidence—you needn't trouble yourself to call here again.'

"The usual consequences followed upon this. Mr. Linwood is too fond of his young lady to resist her and lose her. He accepted any terms she chose to impose on him as the price of being restored to her favor. Half an hour later he was walking with Mr. Bowmore in the garden, and was asking leave to consult him about a claim on Parliament for moneys due to his father's estate. Circumstances allowed me no opportunity of listening safely to what passed at the interview. I can only report, as one result of the conversation, that Mr. Linwood accompanied Mr. Bowmore the same evening to a meeting of the local Hampden Club. I suppose he had his reward the next day by being permitted to put a ring on Miss Char-

lotte's finger in the garden, and to kiss her afterwards to his heart's content! For what took place at the club, I refer you to the special agent who attends there in the character of one of the members.

"*March 10.*—Nothing to report, except the growing intimacy between Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood, and another visit of the two to the Hampden Club. Also the happy progress of the young gentleman's love affair. I only mention this latter trifle by way of necessary reference to Miss Charlotte. She has met old Justice Bervie out riding, and has heard from him of the unexpected return of his son the captain from foreign parts. From what I could pick up of the conversation at dinner, I gather that the justice has been informed of Mr. Linwood's visits to the revolutionary club; that he wrote word of it to his son; and that the captain has returned to set his influence over Mr. Linwood against Mr. Bowmore's influence—if he can. Miss Charlotte is furious at the bare idea of his interference. Poor soul! she honestly believes her father to be the greatest statesman in England. See what it is to be too dutiful a daughter!

"*March 17.*—Being occupied with matters of serious importance, you may not have noticed that Mr. Linwood's claim has been brought before the House of Commons, and has been adjourned for further consideration in six months' time. When the country is threatened with a revolution, Parliament has something better to do than to trouble itself about private claims. It was simply absurd to bring such a matter forward at all.

"This, however, is not the view taken by Mr. Linwood and Mr. Bowmore. They are both indignant—especially Mr. Bowmore. He has decided to call a special meeting of the Hampden Club to consider his friend's wrongs; and he has persuaded Mr. Linwood to have his name put down as a candidate for election into the society. Captain Bervie has attempted to interfere, personally and by writing, and has been repelled. Not Miss Charlotte only, but even that peaceable lady her mother, is shocked at the captain's implied distrust of Mr. Bowmore and the club. Mr. Linwood has informed the captain that he will neither hear nor read one word from him in disparagement of Mr. Bowmore. Miss Charlotte is not ungrateful for this proof of confidence in her father. The gossip among the women in the kitchen informs me that she has consented to appoint the wedding-day.

"*March 26.*—A longer time than usual has elapsed since the date of my last report.

"On reflection, I thought it best to decide our doubt, whether Mr. Bowmore is or is not the secret agent in England of a club of French Republicans, by writing myself to the fountain-head of information in Paris. As you wisely observe, the man himself is a vain fool, who can only give us any serious trouble as an instrument in the hands of others. No such complication as this need be apprehended. After waiting some days for my answer from Paris, I have ascertained that Mr. Bowmore did offer his services to the French club, but that the offer was declined with thanks. Either the Frenchmen made inquiries, or Mr. Bowmore's true character was known to them when they received his proposal.

"Nothing now remains to be decided but the other question of stopping this man's flow of frothy eloquence (which undeniably has its influence on some thousands of ignorant people) by putting him in prison. If I rightly understand your last instructions, the main reason for delay is connected with the present position of Mr. Linwood. Has he too spoken or written seditiously of the government? And is it desirable to include him in the arrest of Mr. Bowmore?

"By way of replying to this, I enclose the short-hand notes of my colleague, charged with reporting the proceedings of the Hampden Club.

"The note numbered One contains Mr. Linwood's speech at the debate, on the question of forcing his claim upon the attention of the government. Judged as oratory, it is wretched stuff. Judged as sedition, it rivals the more elaborate efforts of Mr. Bowmore himself.

"The note numbered Two reports the proceedings at a special sitting of the club this morning. The subject of debate is the proposal before Parliament for suspending the Habeas Corpus Act at the pleasure of the government. You will see that a public meeting, in 'aid of British liberty,' is to be summoned in a field near Dartford on the 2d of April; that the London societies are to receive the committee of the Hampden Club on the next day; that they are to escort Mr. Bowmore to Westminster Hall, and to insist on his being heard at the bar of the House of Commons. You will also perceive that the person who seconds the final resolution submitted to the club—which declares that Parliament must be intimidated, if Parliament can be reached in no other way—is Mr. Percy Linwood himself.

"I have further ascertained that Miss Charlotte was present among 'the ladies in the gallery,' who were permitted to attend the debate, and that she is to be married to Mr. Linwood on the 7th of April next. These circumstances sufficiently account, to my mind,

for the extraordinary imprudence of which Mr. Linwood has been guilty. Mr. Bowmore declares that the 'minions of government dare not touch a hair of his head.' Miss Charlotte believes Mr. Bowmore. And Mr. Linwood believes Miss Charlotte.

"These particulars being communicated, I have now the honor to wait your final instructions.

"*March 31.*—Your commands reached me yesterday at noon.

"Two hours afterwards I obtained leave of absence, and waited privately on Justice Bervie. I had my wig and my other materials for disguise in the pockets of my great-coat; and I found, in a deserted stone quarry, an excellent dressing-room for the needful changes before I visited the justice, and before I returned to my footman's place.

"Arrived at Squire Bervie's, I sent in your confidential letter, and had an interview with the justice, at which I laid my information in due form. On my asking next for warrants to arrest Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood, the justice retired to consider my application. But for your letter, I strongly suspect he would himself have applied to the Home Secretary before granting the warrant against Mr. Linwood. As things were, he had no choice but to do his duty; and even then he did it with a reservation in the shape of a delay. He declined, on purely formal grounds, to date the warrants earlier than the 2d of April. I represented that the public assemblage in the field was to take place on that day, and that the arrest of Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood a day or two earlier might prevent the meeting, by depriving it of its leaders. The justice's reply to this was not very polite: 'I am acting in the exercise of my own discretion, sir. Good-morning.'

"On leaving the house, I noticed three persons in a corner of the hall, who appeared to be interested in watching my departure. Two of them I recognized as Captain Bervie and Major Much, both friends of Mr. Linwood. The third was a lady, whom I have since ascertained to be the captain's sister. That the two gentlemen are interested in steering Mr. Linwood clear of political difficulties, I have no sort of doubt. As to Miss Bervie, I can only say that she was certainly in the company of the major and the captain, and to all appearance in their confidence also.

"To-morrow evening (April 1) there is to be a special session of the club, to make the final arrangements for the management of the public meeting on the 2d. If my warrants had been dated on the 1st, I might quietly arrest Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood on their return from the club, and the news would be spread in time to prevent the meeting. Under existing circumstances (unless I receive

orders from you) I must decide for myself whether I make the arrest before the meeting or after.

"In any case, you may rely on the affair being managed (as the government wish it to be managed) with the strictest secrecy. Your letter to Justice Bervie, containing the Home Secretary's instructions to let no person about him—not even his clerk—know of my application for the warrants, evidently startled the old gentleman. If he ventures to take any living creature into his confidence—and if I discover it—the consequence will be his dismissal from the bench of magistrates. I believe he will hold his tongue. He is sharp enough to understand that Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood (who might otherwise be exhibited as martyrs in the Radical newspapers) are simply to disappear. What an invaluable aid to government is the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act! Forgive my indulging in political reflection—I am in such high spirits at the approaching termination of my labors. At the same time, I pity Miss Charlotte. She is so happy, and so entirely unsuspecting of any misfortune hanging over her head. It is certainly hard to have her lover clapped into prison just before the wedding-day!

"I will bring you word of the arrest myself; there will be plenty of time for me to catch the afternoon coach to London. Between this date and the 2d rely on my keeping a watchful eye on both the gentlemen, and on Mr. Bowmore especially. He is just the man, if he feels the faintest suspicion that he is in any danger, to provide for his own means of escape and to leave Mr. Linwood to shift for himself. I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient humble servant,

"PETER WEEMS."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ELOPEMENT.

On the evening of the 1st of April Mrs. Bowmore was left alone with the servants. Mr. Bowmore and Percy had gone out together to attend the special meeting of the club. Shortly afterwards, Miss Charlotte had left the cottage under very extraordinary circumstances.

A few minutes only after the departure of her father and Percy she received a letter, which appeared to cause her the most violent agitation. She said to Mrs. Bowmore, "Mamma, I must see Captain Bervie for a few minutes in private, on a matter of serious importance to all of us. He is waiting at the front gate, and he will come in if I show myself at the hall door." Upon this Mrs. Bowmore had asked for an explanation. "There is no time for explanation," was

the only answer she received; "I ask you to leave me for five minutes alone with the captain." Mrs. Bowmore, naturally enough, still hesitated. Charlotte snatched up her garden hat and declared wildly that she would go out to Captain Bervie if she was not permitted to receive him at home. In the face of this declaration Mrs. Bowmore yielded and left the room.

In a minute more the captain was in the cottage parlor. Although she had given way to her daughter, Mrs. Bowmore was not disposed to trust her without supervision in the society of a man whom Charlotte herself had reviled as a slanderer and a false friend. She took up her position in the veranda outside the parlor, at a safe distance from one of the two windows of the room, which had been left partially open to admit the fresh air. Here she waited and listened.

The conversation was for some time carried on in whispers. As they became more and more excited, both Charlotte and Bervie ended in unconsciously raising their voices. "I swear it to you on my faith as a Christian!" Mrs. Bowmore heard the captain say. "I declare before God who hears me that I am speaking the truth!" And Charlotte had answered, with a burst of tears, "I can't believe you! I daren't believe you! Oh, how can you ask me to do such a thing? Let me go! let me go!" Alarmed at those words, Mrs. Bowmore advanced to the window and looked in. Bervie had put Charlotte's arm in his arm, and was trying to induce her to leave the parlor with him. She resisted, and implored him to release her. Mrs. Bowmore was on the point of entering the room to interfere, when Bervie suddenly dropped Charlotte's arm, and whispered in her ear. She started as she heard the words, looked at him keenly, and instantly made up her mind. "Let me tell my mother where I am going," she said, "and I will consent." "Be it so," he answered, and hurried her out.

Mrs. Bowmore re-entered the cottage by the adjoining room, and met them in the passage. "Remember one thing," Bervie said, before Charlotte could speak. "Every minute is precious; the fewest words are the best."

In few words Charlotte spoke. "I must go at once to Justice Bervie's house. Don't be afraid, mamma! I know what I am about, and I know that I am right."

"Going to Justice Bervie's!" cried Mrs. Bowmore, in the utmost extremity of astonishment. "What will your father say, what will Percy think, when they come back from the club?"

"My sister's carriage is waiting for me close by," Bervie answered. "It is entirely at Miss Charlotte's disposal. She can easily get back, if she wishes to keep her visit a secret, before Mr. Bowmore and Mr. Linwood return."

He led the way to the door as he spoke. Charlotte kissed her mother tenderly, and followed him. Mrs. Bowmore called to them to wait. "I daren't let you go," she said to her daughter, "without your father's leave!" Charlotte seemed not to hear, the captain seemed not to hear. They ran across the front garden, and through the gate—and were out of sight in less than a minute.

More than two hours had passed; the sun had sunk below the horizon, and still there were no signs of Charlotte's return.

Feeling seriously uneasy, Mrs. Bowmore crossed the room to ring the bell, and send the man-servant to Justice Bervie's house to hasten her daughter's return. As she approached the fireplace, she was startled by a sound of stealthy footsteps in the hall, followed by a loud noise as of some heavy object that had dropped on the floor. She rang the bell violently, and then hurried to the door of the parlor. As she opened it, the footman passed her, running out, apparently in pursuit of somebody, at the top of his speed. She followed him as rapidly as she could, out of the cottage, and across the little front garden, to the gate. Arrived in the road, she was just in time to see him vault upon the luggage board at the back of a post-chaise, which had apparently passed the cottage, and drawn up a little beyond it. Peter gained the board just as the postillion started the horses on the way to London. He saw Mrs. Bowmore looking at him, before the carriage had greatly increased its distance from the cottage, and pointed, with an insolent nod of his head, first to the inside of the vehicle, and then over it to the high-road; signing to her that he designed to accompany the person in the post-chaise to the end of the journey.

Turning to go back to the cottage, Mrs. Bowmore saw her own bewilderment reflected in the faces of the two female servants, who had followed her out.

"Who can Peter be after, ma'am?" asked the cook. "Do you think it's a thief?"

The house-maid pointed to the post-chaise, barely visible in the distance. "Simpleton!" she said. "Do thieves travel in that way? I wish my master had come back," she proceeded, speaking to herself. "I'm afraid there's something wrong."

Mrs. Bowmore, returning through the garden gate, instantly stopped and looked at the woman.

"What makes you mention your master's name, Amelia, when you fear that something is wrong?" she asked.

Amelia changed color, and looked confused.

"I am loath to alarm you, ma'am," she said, "and I can't rightly see what it is my duty to do."

Mrs. Bowmore's heart sank within her under the cruellest of all terrors, the terror of something unknown. "Don't keep me in suspense," she said, faintly. "Whatever it is let me know it."

She led the way back to the parlor. The house-maid followed her. The cook, declining to be left alone, followed the house-maid.

"It was something I heard this afternoon, ma'am," Amelia began. "Cook happened to be busy—"

The cook interposed: she had not forgiven the house-maid for calling her a simpleton. "No, Amelia! If you *must* bring me into it—not busy. Uneasy in my mind on the subject of the soup."

"I don't know that your mind makes much difference," Amelia proceeded. "What it comes to is this—it was I, and not you, who went into the kitchen-garden for the vegetables."

"Not by *my* wish, Heaven knows!" persisted the cook.

"Leave the room!" said Mrs. Bowmore. Even her patience had given way at last.

The cook looked as if she declined to believe her own ears. Mrs. Bowmore pointed to the door. The cook said "Oh?" accenting it as a question. Mrs. Bowmore's finger still pointed. The cook, in solemn silence, yielded to circumstances, and banged the door.

"I was getting the vegetables, ma'am," Amelia resumed, "when I heard voices on the other side of the paling. The wood is so old that one can see through the cracks easy enough. I saw my master and Mr. Linwood and Captain Bervie. The captain seemed to have stopped the other two on the pathway that leads to the field; he stood, as it might be, between them and the back way to the house—and he spoke severely, that he did! 'For the last time, Mr. Bowmore,' says he, 'will you understand that you are in danger, and that Mr. Linwood is in danger, unless you both leave this neighborhood to-night?' My master made light of it. 'For the last time,' says he, 'will you refer us to a proof of what you say, and allow us to judge for ourselves?' 'I have told you already,' says the captain, 'I am bound by my duty towards another person to keep what I know a secret.' 'Very well,' says my master, 'I am bound by my duty to my country. And I tell you this,' says he, in his high and mighty way, 'neither government, nor the spies of government, dare touch a hair of my head: they know it, sir, for the head of the people's friend!' The captain lost his temper. 'What stuff!' says he; 'there's a government spy in your house at this moment, disguised as your footman.' My master looked at Mr. Linwood, and burst out laughing. 'Peter a spy!' says he; 'poor Peter! You won't beat that, captain, if you talk till doomsday.' He turned about without a word more, and went home. The captain caught Mr. Linwood by the arm, as soon as they were alone. 'For God's sake,'

says he, 'don't follow that madman's example! If you value your liberty, if you hope to become Charlotte's husband, consult your own safety. I can give you a passport. Escape to France, and wait till this trouble is over.' Mr. Linwood was not in the best of tempers—Mr. Linwood shook him off. 'Charlotte's father will soon be my father,' says he; 'do you think I will desert him? My friends at the club have taken up my claim: do you think I will forsake them at the meeting to-morrow? You ask me to be unworthy of Charlotte, and unworthy of my friends—you insult me if you say more.' He whipped round on his heel, and followed my master. The captain lifted his hands to the heavens, and looked—I declare it turned my blood, ma'am, to see him. If there's truth in mortal man, it's my firm belief—"

What the house-maid's belief was remained unexpressed. Before she could get to her next word, a shriek of horror from the hall announced that the cook's powers of interruption were not exhausted yet.

Mistress and servant both hurried out, in terror of they knew not what. There stood the cook, alone in the hall, confronting the stand on which the overcoats and hats of the men of the family were placed. "Where's the master's travelling coat?" cried the cook, staring wildly at an unoccupied peg. "And where's his cap to match? Oh, Lord, he's off in the post-chaise! and Peter's after him!"

Simpleton as she was, the woman, loitering about the hall, had blundered on a very serious discovery. Coat and cap—both made after a foreign pattern, and both strikingly remarkable in form and color to English eyes—had unquestionably disappeared. It was equally certain that they were well known to Peter as the coat and cap which his master used in travelling. Had Mr. Bowmore discovered that he was really in danger? Had the necessities of instant flight only allowed him time enough to snatch his coat and cap out of the hall? And had Peter seen him as he was making his escape to the post-chaise? The cook's conclusion answered all these questions in the affirmative; and if Captain Bervie's words of warning were to be believed, the cook's conclusion for once was not to be despised.

Under this last trial of her fortitude, Mrs. Bowmore's feeble reserves of endurance completely gave away. The poor lady turned faint and giddy. Amelia placed her on a chair in the hall, and told the cook to open the front-door and let in the fresh air. The cook obeyed; and instantly broke out with a second terrific scream, announcing nothing less, this time, than the appearance of Mr. Bowmore himself, alive and hearty, returning with Percy from the meeting at the club!

The inevitable inquiries and explanations followed. Fully assured as he had declared himself to be, of the sanctity of his person (politically speaking), Mr. Bowmore turned pale, nevertheless, when he looked at the unoccupied peg on his clothes-stand. Had some man unknown personated him? And had a post-chaise been hired to lead an impending pursuit of him in the wrong direction? What did it mean? Who was the friend to whose services he was indebted? As for the proceedings of Peter, but one interpretation could now be placed on them. They distinctly justified Captain Bervie's assertion that the footman was a spy. Mr. Bowmore thought of the captain's other assertion, relating to the urgent necessity for making his escape, and looked at Percy in silent dismay, and turned paler than ever.

Percy's thoughts, diverted for the moment only from the lady of his love, returned to her with renewed fidelity. "Let us hear what Charlotte thinks of it," he said. "Where is she?"

Another explanation followed this question. Terrified at the effect which it produced on Percy, helplessly ignorant when she was called upon to account for her daughter's absence, Mrs. Bowmore could only shed tears and express a devout trust in Providence. Her husband looked at the new misfortune from a political point of view. He sat down, and slapped his forehead theatrically with the palm of his hand. "Thus far," said the patriot, "my political assailants have only struck at me through the newspapers. *Now* they strike at me through my child!" Percy made no speeches. There was a look in his eyes which boded ill for the captain, if the two met. "I am going to fetch her," was all he said, "as fast as a horse can carry me."

He hired his horse at an inn in the town, and set forth for Justice Bervie's house at a gallop.

During Percy's absence, Mr. Bowmore secured the front and back entrances to the cottage with his own hands. These first precautions taken, he ascended to his room and packed his travelling-bag.

"Necessaries for my use in prison," he remarked. "The blood-hounds of government are after me." "Are they after Percy too?" his wife ventured to ask. Mr. Bowmore looked up impatiently, and cried, "Pooh!" as if Percy was of no consequence. Mrs. Bowmore thought otherwise: the good woman privately packed a bag for Percy in the sanctuary of her own room.

For an hour, and more than an hour, no event of any sort occurred. Mr. Bowmore stalked up and down the parlor, meditating. At intervals, ideas of flight presented themselves attractively to his mind. At intervals, ideas of the speech that he had prepared for

the public meeting on the next day took their place. "If I fly to-night," he wisely observed, "what will become of my speech? I will *not* fly to-night! Let them put me in prison—the people shall hear me!"

He sat down and crossed his arms fiercely. As he looked at his wife, to see what effect he had produced on her, the sound of heavy carriage-wheels and the trampling of horses penetrated to the parlor from the garden gate. Mr. Bowmore started to his feet, with every appearance of having suddenly altered his mind on the question of flight. Just as he reached the hall, Percy's voice was heard at the front door. "Let me in. Instantly! Instantly!"

Mrs. Bowmore drew back the bolts before the servants could help her. "Where is Charlotte?" she cried, seeing Percy alone on the door-step.

"Gone!" Percy answered, furiously. "Eloped to Paris with Captain Bervie! Read her own confession. They were just sending the messenger with it when I reached the house."

He handed a note to Mrs. Bowmore, and turned aside to speak to her husband while she read it. Charlotte wrote to her mother very briefly:

"DEAREST MOTHER,—I have left you for a few days. Pray don't be alarmed about me, and pray don't think ill of me. Everything shall be explained on my return. I am under the most careful protection—and I have a lady for my companion on the journey. I will write again from Paris. Your loving daughter,

"CHARLOTTE."

Percy took Mr. Bowmore by the arm, and pointed to a carriage and four horses waiting at the garden gate. "Do you come with me, and back me with your authority as her father?" he asked, briefly and sternly. "Or do you leave me to go alone?"

Mr. Bowmore was famous among his admirers for his "happy replies." He made one now.

"I am not Brutus," he said. "I am only Bowmore. My daughter before everything. Fetch my travelling-bag."

While the travellers' bags were being placed in the chaise, Mr. Bowmore was struck by an idea. He produced from his coat-pocket a roll of many papers, thickly covered with writing. On the blank leaf in which they were tied up he wrote, in the largest letters: "Frightful domestic calamity! Vice-president Bowmore obliged to leave England! Welfare of a beloved daughter! His speech will be read at the meeting by President Joskin of the Club. (Private to Joskin: Have these lines printed, and posted everywhere;

and, for God's sake, don't drop your voice at the ends of the sentences)."

He threw down the pen, and embraced Mrs. Bowmore in the most summary manner. The poor woman was ordered to send the roll of paper to the club, without a word to comfort and sustain her from her husband's lips. Percy spoke to her hopefully and kindly as he kissed her cheek at parting. In another moment lover and father had started on the first stage from Dartford to Dover.

CHAPTER X.

PURSUIT AND DISCOVERY.

FEELING himself hurried away from all possible pursuit as fast as four horses could carry him, Mr. Bowmore had leisure to criticise Percy's conduct from his own purely selfish point of view.

"If you had listened to my advice," he said, "or if you had only suffered yourself to be persuaded by my daughter, who inherits my unerring instincts, you would have treated that man Bervie like the hypocrite and villain that he is. But no! you trust to your own crude impressions. Having given him your hand after the duel (I would have given him the contents of my pistol!) you hesitated to withdraw it again when that slanderer appealed to your friendship not to cast him off. Now you see the consequence!"

"Wait till we get to Paris." All the ingenuity of Percy's travelling companion failed to extract from him any other answer than that.

Foiled so far, Mr. Bowmore began to start difficulties next. Had they money enough for the journey? Percy touched his pocket, and answered, shortly, "Plenty." Had they passports? Percy suddenly showed a letter. "There is the necessary voucher from a magistrate," he said. "The consul at Dover will give us our passports. Mind this!" he added, in warning tones: "I have pledged my word of honor to Justice Bervie that we have no political object in view in travelling to France. Keep your politics to yourself on the other side of the Channel."

Mr. Bowmore listened in blank amazement. Charlotte's lover was appearing in a new character—the character of a man who was actually losing his respect for Charlotte's father!

It was useless to talk to him. He deliberately checked any further attempts at conversation by leaning back in the carriage and closing his eyes. The truth is, Mr. Bowmore's own language and conduct were insensibly producing the salutary impression on Percy's mind which Bervie had vainly tried to convey under the disad-

vantage of having Charlotte's influence against him. Throughout the journey Percy did exactly what Bervie had once entreated him to do—he kept Mr. Bowmore at a distance.

At every stage, they inquired after the fugitives. At every stage, they were answered by a more or less intelligible description of Bervie and Charlotte, and of the lady who accompanied them. No disguise had been attempted; no person had in any case been bribed to conceal the truth.

When the first tumult of his emotions had in some degree subsided, this strange circumstance associated itself in Percy's mind with the equally unaccountable conduct of Justice Bervie on his arrival at the Manor House. The old gentleman met his visitor in the hall, without expressing, and apparently without feeling, any indignation at his son's conduct. It was even useless to appeal to him for information. He only said, "I am not in Arthur's confidence; he is of age, and my daughter is of age—I have no claim to control them. I believe they have taken Miss Bowmore to Paris; and that is all I know about it." He had shown the same dense insensibility in giving his official voucher for the passports. Percy had only to satisfy him on the question of politics, and the document was drawn out as a matter of course. Such had been the father's behavior; and the conduct of the son now exhibited the same shameless composure. To what conclusion did this discovery point? Over and over again Percy asked himself that question, and over and over again he abandoned the attempt to answer it in despair.

They reached Dover towards two o'clock in the morning.

At the pier-head they found a coast-guardsmen on duty, and more information. In 1817 the communication with France was still by sailing vessels. Arriving long after the departure of the regular packet, Bervie had hired a lugger, and had sailed with the two ladies for Calais, having a fresh breeze in his favor. Percy's first angry impulse was to follow him instantly. The next moment he remembered the insurmountable obstacle of the passports. The consul would certainly not grant those essentially necessary documents at two in the morning! The only alternative was to wait for the regular packet, which sailed some hours later—between eight and nine o'clock in the forenoon. In this case, they might apply for their passports before the regular office hours, if they explained the circumstances, backed by the authority of the magistrate's letter.

Mr. Bowmore followed Percy to the nearest inn that was open, with sublime indifference to the delays and difficulties of the journey. He ordered refreshments with the air of a man who was performing a melancholy duty to himself in the name of humanity. "When I think of my speech," he said, at supper, "my heart bleeds

for the people. In a few hours more they will assemble in their thousands, eager to hear me. And what will they see? Joskin in my place! Joskin with a manuscript in his hand! Joskin who drops his voice at the ends of his sentence! I will never forgive Charlotte. Waiter, another glass of brandy-and-water."

Having succeeded in obtaining their passports, the travellers were troubled by no further difficulties. After an unusually quick passage across the Channel they continued their journey by post as far as Amiens, and reached that city in time to take their places by the diligence to Paris.

Arriving in Paris on the 3d of April, they encountered another incomprehensible proceeding on the part of Captain Bervie.

Among the persons assembled in the yard to see the arrival of the diligence was a man with a morsel of paper in his hand, evidently on the lookout for some person whom he expected to discover among the travellers. After consulting his bit of paper, he looked with steady attention at Percy and Mr. Bowmore, and suddenly approached them. "If you wish to see the captain," he said, in broken English, "you will find him at that hotel." He handed a printed card to Percy, and disappeared among the crowd before it was possible to question him.

Even Mr. Bowmore gave way to human weakness, and condescended to feel astonished in the face of such an event as this. "What next?" he exclaimed.

"Wait till we get to the hotel," said Percy.

In half an hour more they had got to the hotel.

Percy pushed aside the waiter, as soon as he saw the door before him, and burst into the room.

The captain was alone, sitting by the window reading a newspaper. Before the first furious words had escaped Percy's lips, Bervie silenced him by pointing to a closed door on the right of the fireplace. "She is there," he said; "speak quietly, or you may frighten her. I know what you are going to say," he added, as Percy stepped nearer to him, determined to be heard. "Will you give me a minute to speak in my defence, and then decide whether I am the greatest scoundrel living, or the best friend you ever had?"

He put the question earnestly and kindly, with something that was at once grave and tender in his look and manner. The extraordinary composure with which he acted and spoke had its tranquilizing influence over Percy. For the moment, at least, he felt himself surprised into giving Bervie a hearing.

"I will tell you first what I have done," Bervie proceeded, "and next why I did it. For reasons presently to be mentioned, I have taken it on myself, Mr. Linwood, to make an alteration in your wed-

ding arrangements. Instead of being married at Dartford Church, you will be married, if you see no objection, at the chapel of the Embassy in Paris, by my old college friend the chaplain."

This was too much for Percy's self-control. "Your audacity is beyond belief!" he broke out. "Even granting that you speak the truth, how dare you interfere in my affairs without my permission?"

Bervie held up his hand for silence. "One minute's hearing isn't much to ask," he said. "Take that cane in the corner, and treat me as you would treat a dog that had bitten you, if I don't make you alter your opinion of me in one minute more by the clock!"

Percy hesitated. Mr. Bowmore seized the opportunity of making himself heard.

"This is all very well, Captain Bervie," he began. "But I, for one, object, under any circumstances, to be made the victim of a trick."

"You are the victim of your own obstinate refusal to profit by a plain warning," Bervie rejoined. "At the eleventh hour I entreated you, and I entreated Mr. Linwood, to provide for your own safety—and I spoke in vain."

Percy's patience gave way once more. "Your minute by the clock is passing," he interposed; "and you have said nothing to justify yourself yet."

"Very well put!" Mr. Bowmore chimed in. "Come to the point, sir! My daughter's reputation is in question."

"Miss Bowmore's reputation is not in question for a single instant," Bervie answered. "My sister has been the companion of her journey from first to last."

"Journey?" Mr. Bowmore repeated, indignantly. "I want to know, sir, what the journey means. As an outraged father, I ask one plain question. Why did you run away with my daughter?"

Instead of answering the "outraged father," Bervie took two slips of paper from his pocket, and handed them to Percy with a smile.

"I ran away with the bride," he said, coolly, "in the certain knowledge that you and Mr. Bowmore would run after me. If I had not forced you both to follow me out of England on the 1st of April, you would have been made state prisoners on the 2d. Those slips of paper are copies of the warrants which my father's duty compelled him to issue for 'the arrest of Percy Linwood and Orlando Bowmore!' I may divulge the secret *now*—warrants are waste paper here. Don't speak, Percy! the minute isn't quite at an end yet. Answer me one question, and I have done. I vowed I would be worthy of your generosity on the day when you spared my life. Have I kept my word?"

For once there was an Englishman who was not contented to express the noblest emotions that humanity can feel by the commonplace ceremony of shaking hands. Percy's heart overflowed. In an outburst of unutterable gratitude, he threw himself on Bervie's breast. As brothers the two men embraced. As brothers they loved and trusted one another from that day forth.

The door of the room on the right was softly opened from within. A charming face—the dark eyes bright with happy tears, the rosy lips just opening into a smile—peeped into the room. A low, sweet voice, with an under-note of trembling in it, made this modest protest in the form of an inquiry:

“When you have quite done with him, Percy, perhaps you will have something to say to ME?”

LAST WORDS.

I.

THE letter which Charlotte wrote to her mother, on the day of Percy's arrival in Paris, contains certain facts which may be reproduced with advantage at the close of the story.

Failing to persuade her to consent to his daring stratagem on any other terms, Bervie had taken Charlotte to his father, and had prevailed upon the justice to run the risk of trusting her with the secret of the coming arrests. Having first promised to respect the confidence placed in her until the 2d of April was over and past, she had no choice left, on the evening of the 1st, but to let her father and her lover go to prison, or to take her place with Captain Bervie and his sister in the travelling carriage.

The person whose daring and dexterity had drawn the spy away in the wrong direction, exactly at the time when his absence was of the utmost importance, was no other than Major Much. That old campaigner, being a guest at the Manor House when Charlotte arrived, and hearing that the false footman was the one obstacle in the way of his dear Arthur's success, hit on the bright idea of personating Mr. Bowmore. They were both of the same height and build. Dressed in the patriot's travelling coat and cap, the back view of Major Much (presented to Peter as soon as the necessary noise had brought the spy up from the kitchen to the hall) would have deceived anybody. At every stage on the way to London, the major was as careful to lie back like a sleeper, with his handkerchief over his face, as Peter was to look in at the carriage-window and make sure that his victim was inside. Arrived at his own lodgings, the

old soldier rushed in, under cover of the darkness, in admirable imitation of a man who was afraid to be seen. Keeping watch himself over the house, Peter sent for assistance to his superior officer by the first unemployed man who would carry his letter. As soon as the church clocks, striking midnight, announced that the second day of April had lawfully begun, he and his assistants entered the house with their warrant, encountering no opposition on the part of the servant who opened the door. The first person whom they discovered was Major Much, smoking his pipe, in his own character, and denying all knowledge of Mr. Bowmore's whereabouts with such a judiciously assumed expression of confusion that Peter and his men wasted hours in searching the house and interrogating the inmates from the kitchen to the garret. By the time the spy had arrived at his first suspicion that he might have been imposed upon, and had made his way back to Dartford by the morning coach, Percy and Mr. Bowmore were eating their breakfast at Dessein's Hotel in Calais.

Having relieved her mother's anxiety so far, Charlotte touched next on the subject of her-marriage.

"Miss Bervie will be my bridesmaid," she wrote, "and our dear captain will be Percy's 'best man,' and papa will 'give me away,' of course. But nothing can be done without you. An experienced courier has received Percy's instructions to escort you to Paris. You must come here, dearest mother, not only for my sake, but for your own sake too. Neither Percy nor papa can return to England, and your being left alone at Dartford is not to be thought of. Besides, you will help to quiet papa's mind. Do what we can to pacify him, he persists in being angry with Captain Bervie. When I remind him that he would have been put into prison if the captain had not saved him, he smiles sorrowfully. 'I could have reconciled my mind to a prison,' he says; 'but what I can not endure is being made the victim of a trick!'"

With this domestic anecdote, and with sundry instructions relating to the packing of dresses, the letter came to an end.

A fortnight later the marriage took place. The persons immediately interested were the only persons present. At the little breakfast afterwards, Mr. Bowmore insisted on making a speech to a select audience of five—namely, the bride and bridegroom, the chaplain, the captain, and Mrs. Bowmore. But what does a small audience matter? The English frenzy for making speeches is not to be cooled by such a trifle as that. At the end of the world the expiring forces of Nature will hear a dreadful voice—the voice of the last Englishman making the last speech. Mr. Bowmore spoke for half an hour. Subject of the discourse: How can I be most useful to my country

at the present crisis? As an exile on the Continent, or as a martyr in prison? Answer to the question: My friends, let us leave it to time.

Percy wisely made his honey-moon a long one: he determined to be quite sure of his superior influence over his wife before he trusted her within reach of her father again. Mr. and Mrs. Bowmore accompanied Captain Bervie, on his way back to England, as far as Boulogne. In that pleasant town the banished patriot set up his tent. It was a cheaper place to live in than Paris; and it was conveniently close to England, when he had quite made up his mind whether to be exile or martyr. In the end, the course of events settled that question for him. Mr. Bowmore returned to England with the return of the Habeas Corpus Act.

II.

The years passed. Percy and Charlotte (judged from the romantic point of view) became two perfectly uninteresting married people. Bervie (always remaining a bachelor) rose steadily in his profession through the higher grades of military rank. Mr. Bowmore, wisely overlooked by a new government, sank back again into the obscurity from which shrewd ministers would never have assisted him to emerge. The one subject of interest left among the persons of this little drama was now represented by Doctor Lagarde. Thus far not a trace had been discovered of the French physician who had so strangely associated the visions of his magnetic sleep with the destinies of the two men who had consulted him.

Steadfastly maintaining his own opinion of the prediction and the fulfilment, Bervie persisted in believing that he and Lagarde (or Percy and Lagarde) were yet destined to meet and resume the unfinished consultation at the point where it had been broken off. Persons happy in the possession of "sound common-sense," who declared the prediction to be skilled guesswork, and the fulfilment manifest coincidence—other persons, whose minds halted midway between the mystic and the rational view, and who set up a theory of "thought-reading" as the true solution of the problem—agreed, nevertheless, in ridiculing the idea of finding Doctor Lagarde as closely akin to that other celebrated idea of finding the needle in the bottle of hay. But Bervie's obstinacy was proverbial. Nothing shook his confidence in his own convictions.

More than thirteen years had elapsed since the consultation at the doctor's lodgings, when Bervie went to Paris to spend a summer holiday with his friend the chaplain to the English Embassy. His last words to Percy and Charlotte when he took his leave were, "Suppose I meet with Doctor Lagarde?"

It was then the year 1830. Bervie arrived at his friend's rooms

on the 24th of July. On the 27th of the month the famous revolution broke out which dethroned Charles the Tenth in three days.

On the second day Bervie and his host ventured into the streets, watching the revolution (like other reckless Englishmen) at the risk of their lives. In the confusion around them they were separated. Bervie, searching for his companion, found his progress stopped by a barricade, which had been desperately attacked and desperately defended. Men in blouses and men in uniform lay dead and dying together. The tricolored flag waved over them in token of the victory of the people. Bervie had just revived a poor wretch with a drink from an overthrown bowl of water which still had a few drops left in it, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder from behind. He turned and discovered a National Guard, who had been watching his charitable action. "Give a hand to that poor fellow," said the citizen; "he wants some one to help him." He looked as he spoke, at a workman standing near, grimed with blood and gunpowder. The tears were rolling down the man's cheeks. "I can't see my way, sir, for crying," he said. "Help me to carry that sad burden into the next street." He pointed to a rude wooden litter on which lay a dead or wounded man, his face and breast covered with an old cloak. "There is the best friend the people ever had," the workman said. "He cured us, comforted us, respected us, loved us—and there he lies, shot dead while he was binding up the wounds of friends and enemies alike!"

"Whoever he is, he has died nobly," Bervie answered. "May I look at him?"

The workman signed that he might look.

Bervie lifted the cloak—and met with Doctor Lagarde once more

THE END.





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